



Corruption in Syria

Causes, Effects, and Anti-Corruption Strategies



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Introduction:

Corruption, in all its forms, is a disease infecting political, economic, and social systems, which threatens their structures and disrupts their development and scientific progression. Many countries have implemented anti-corruption strategies, individually and collectively, whether at the domestic level, through internal laws, or at the international level, through international covenants, treaties, and agreements. This research illuminates the causes and effects of corruption in Syria that have existed since before the revolution and offers a private sector perspective on anti-corruption strategies.

Research Methodology:

This research depends on a descriptive, analytical, and principled method that depends on jurisprudential studies and their applied and realistic dimensions. It depends also on the SPSS program for field data progression and analysis.

Research Sample and Limits:

We surveyed 146 Syrian businesspeople and members of the opposition in Gaziantep, Turkey. After processing data, 9 questionnaires were deleted due to lack of usable data, and 136 questionnaires were kept.

Public Corruption Definition:

Transparency International, founded in 1993, defines corruption as the misuse of power for private gains. The Social Science Encyclopedia defines it as an abuse of public power for private benefits. Others have defined corruption as the misuse of power for illegal purposes and private gains.



Specific Definition of Corruption:

The specific definition of corruption is an illegal payment of a bribe or commission to public employees and officials in both private and public sectors to facilitate tenders.

There is no doubt that it is difficult to state a universal definition for corruption, which is why most laws do not specify a definition for it. While there are many categories of corruption, it usually comes in the following forms:

Most Common Types of Corruption in Syria:

1) Bribery:

“The offering, promising, giving, accepting or soliciting of an advantage as an inducement for an action which is illegal or a breach of trust.”¹ Bribery is one of the most dangerous types of abuse of public duties. Along with this ethical degeneration of the bribe giver or taker, this act is an obstacle to economic development, and it overburdens a citizen with unbearable financial expenses. This distorts the exchange of commodities and services, on both the public and private level. It is worth mentioning that Penal Law in Syria does not make bribery a crime in the private sector. Legislators should rectify this legislative insufficiency and outlaw bribery altogether; otherwise, corruption spreads through both the public and the private sectors.

¹ Business Principles for Countering Bribery A MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVE LED BY TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL: http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/pub/business_principles_for_countering_bribery



Bribery is widespread in all public sectors in Syria. Bribery and similar acts, like accepting gifts for doing an official duty, are most common in the judicial system and security services, authorities that issue licenses, customs, and other local authorities. That is the main reason that businessmen add payoffs to the value of goods and services, which ultimately burdens the citizen consumers.

2) Abuse of Power:

Abuse of power is considered to be another type of corruption, according to the Penal Law in Syria. Abusers of power exploit their connections with decision makers (real or virtual connections) to trap their victims into financial or moral payoffs.

3) Embezzlement of Public Funds:

Embezzlement is considered a crime of general administration according to Penal Law in Syria, and a crime of corruption according to the jurisprudence.

A public employee who is entrusted with public funds must only use them only as authorized by law. Otherwise, the employee is guilty of embezzlement, which is considered the most pervasive corruption crime after bribery.

Causes of Corruption:

1) Political Causes:

The governing system is the main reason of corruption. When the regime moves toward dictatorship, it becomes a fertile ground for corruption. With the increase



of authoritarian leadership, democracy vanishes, limiting authority to the hands of power brokers, who neither hold an elected office nor responsibility in front of the people. Conflict within government structures increases the quantity and quality of corruption on all levels: financial, administrative, economic, and social. It should be pointed out that corruption in Syria exists in all systems without exception, at all levels and ranks, due to idolizing the governor and forgetting the concepts of the modern state and democracy.

2– Economic Causes:

Economic causes of corruption directly result from political ones. Absence of economic democracy is an inevitable result of the absence of political democracy, where the free market disappears and capital monopoly is retained only in the few hands that are connected to political decision makers. Thus, the economy does not represent the nation as much as it represents the interests of a narrow alliance of elites—monopolists of politics and the economy. This is the fundamental reason behind the state’s inability to provide basic needs and the disruption in national production centers in the industrial, commercial, and tourist realms.

Corruption in the economy lowers individual income, which is reflected negatively in our value system, our thinking methods, and our social movements because the inability to provide for basic needs makes individuals more susceptible to bribery. It also leads to the spread of corruption crimes in the administrative and financial realms, according to specified descriptions in Penal Law. Corruption is



blamed as well for failure to attract foreign investments, and the flight of local capital.

3– Administrative and Financial Causes:

Disruption and disorganization in the structure of the state administrative systems, ambiguity and confusion of specializations, absence or ineffectiveness of control systems, and the spread of favoritism and cronyism all inevitably make fertile ground for corruption, which at a minimum is represented in bribery, embezzlement, misuse of power, favoritism, and sometimes fraud.

4– Social and Moral Causes:

Another cause of corruption is deviation from moral values and religion, which result from the absence of functioning institutions and teamwork that is supposed to be a basis of democracy. This kind of deviation encourages corruption and justifies it. Consequently, corruption via these systemic social and moral deviations enables the violation of other individuals' rights with no conscience or social values to prevent it. This kind of corruption facilitates widespread financial and administrative corruption.

Effects of Corruption:

1) Legal Effects:

Corruption affects the whole political system negatively—its legitimacy, stability, and reputation—and poses a serious challenge to political development. It undermines democracy and good governance. Corruption of legislative, executive, and judicial authorities subverts their constitutional



duties. Accordingly, decisions are made that neither achieve nor represent the public interest.

In other words, corruption erodes the institutional capacity of government as procedures are disregarded, resources are siphoned off, and public offices are bought and sold. It is as if the state is going through feudalism—an age of ignorance.

The widespread corruption in the domain of the judicial authority is the most dangerous. The trials held against corrupt figures were selective, unorganized, and not for anti-corruption purposes as much as they were a pretense of fighting corruption in front of public opinion. Such trials were suggested by decision-making authorities, such as security services, which are considered the most corrupted and corruptive.

It should be noted that some administrative procedures in Syria delayed or prevented individuals from going to court, thereby helping protect employees guilty of corruption. In some cases, the judiciary was prevented from direct anti-corruption prosecutions except after a referral by the administrative office of these employees.

2– Economic Effects:

Corruption also undermines economic development by generating considerable distortions and inefficiencies in the economy. In the private sector, corruption increases the cost of doing business through the price of



illicit payments themselves, the management cost of negotiating with officials, and the risk of breached agreements or detection. Although some claim corruption reduces costs by cutting red tape, the availability of bribes can also induce officials to contrive new rules and delays in formal processes. Where corruption inflates the cost of business, it also distorts the commercial field, shielding firms with connections from competition and thereby sustaining inefficient firms. Additionally, corruption leads to failure in attracting foreign investments and efflux of local capital.

Corruption also generates economic distortions in the public sector by diverting public investment into capital projects where bribes are more plentiful. Officials may increase the technical complexity of public sector projects to conceal or pave the way for such dealings, thus further distorting investment. Corruption also lowers compliance with construction, environmental, or other regulations, reduces the quality of government services, and increases budgetary pressures on government.

3 – Social Effects:

Corruption generates distortion in moral values, as well as the spread of apathy and passivity among members of society, the emergence of fanatic and extreme opinions, and the spread of crime in reaction to moral deterioration and inequality of opportunities.

Corruption also generates non-professionalism; loss of work value; psychological acceptance of neglect of official duties, control standards, and



public rights; and a sense of injustice among the majority. The latter in turn creates social tension and hatred among social classes, spreads poverty, and marginalizes affected groups, especially women, children, and youth.

Anti-Corruption Strategies:

Anti-corruption is most effective by integrative work, not isolated approaches. The integrative method requires prevention measures to counter corruption perpetrators.

First: Prevention Measures of Anti-Corruption

1) Reform of the State Institutions:

Undoubtedly, administrative reform of all institutional structures in Syria requires an effective anti-corruption role, especially in institutions dealing with individuals and the private sector. Whether in building human capacities of the institutions in accordance with scientific methods in order to establish a qualified staff, or organizing inter-institutional connections free from bureaucratic barriers, reforming state institutions effectively contributes to narrowing opportunities for corruption as a first step toward its elimination and eradication.

2) Religious Awareness:

The role of religious teachings, due to their grounding in morality, is highly effective in preventing corruption. Religion calls for a submissive relationship between creation and Creator, and making individuals' relationships based on respecting the rights of all people without exception. Undoubtedly, religion



contributes to imparting values and virtue within souls and discourages all kinds of deviations, including corruption.

3) Media:

All types of media—written, audio, and visual—have an effective preventive role in detecting corruption before it happens. The media should monitor all public officials and create a healthy fear of detection amongst those who might be tempted to engage in corrupt practices.

It should be pointed out that the mass media in Syria has played no role in detecting corruption. The media was and still is in the hands of the regime and is directed in accordance with its interests and policies.

4) Collective Approach in Work:

A collective and participative approach to work is definitely considered a basic step in preventing improper conduct, a type of corruption. The formation of parties and citizens' participation in associations, civil society organizations, think tanks, political parties, and other legal organizations creates inside individuals a resistance to illegal conduct. They can also play a role in raising awareness about corruption and in influencing public opinion.



Second: Anti-Corruption Means of Deterrence:

Preventive measures are not enough to fight corruption; it takes also deterrent means against corruption's perpetrators and its roots in the administrative system. The means of deterring corruption are summarized in two types: legislative and judicial.

1) Legislative Means:

Laws are considered an essential means to deter and limit corruption. Legislative anti-corruption is accomplished on two levels: first, amendment of current laws in accordance with corruption realities, and second, issuance of new legislation specialized in corruption.

- a) As for the first level, amendment of current laws should include enhanced sanctions for corruption crimes such as bribery, favoritism, and jobbery. Amendments should also include developing the oversight functions and accountability of legislative bodies through international best practice in this area, such as directing questions to ministers, introducing projects for public discussion, examining means, and discussing the issue of trusting the governing system.

- b) As for the second level, new anti-corruption legislation should be issued. New laws are needed in Syria on disclosing financial accounts of high-ranking officials; illicit enrichment; free access to information; and other laws that remedy maladministration in the state institutions, misuse of power, lack of



financial and administrative commitment, and absence of accountability and transparency in public official processes.

2) Judicial Means:

In order to deter corruption on all levels, it is necessary to build an independent, fair, and effective judicial system in Syria and liberate it from all factors that might undermine its work, within a democratic framework that includes the principle of separation of powers.

It should be noted that the efficiency of a judicial system in anti-corruption is accomplished through fast adjudication of corruption courts and international standards applied on the judicial level. The more the judiciary fairly and promptly adjudicates the cases presented, the more it generates credibility in the public conscience that there is no complacency within corruption courts.

– Analytic Study:

We designed a questionnaire regarding the state of corruption in Syria. The survey instruments covered questions on the types and causes of corruption, anti-corruption strategies, and courts of corruption in Syria, as shown in the attached questionnaire. This survey was conducted through a combination of direct contact and email correspondence with Syrian businesspeople and members of the opposition.



Ranking Types of Corruption :

As shown in table (1), bribery is ranked as the most common form of corruption in Syria, followed by abuse of power, intimidation, bureaucracy, and red tape.

Table (1)

Ranking Top Corruption Types

Corruption Types	Average Arithmetic	Standard Error
Bribery	1.37	.052
Abuse of Power	2.57	.090
Intimidation	2.87	.126
Bureaucracy	4.00	.093
Red Tape	4.11	.058

Ranking Causes of Corruption:

As illustrated in table (2), the main causes of corruption are as follows: ineffectiveness of control systems, absence of religious role, conflicting and complicated laws, unfamiliarity with laws, and poverty.

Table (2)

Ranking Causes of Corruption Spread

Causes of Corruption Spread	Average Arithmetic	Standard Error
Ineffective Control Systems	1.56	.080
Absence of Religious Role	2.98	.135
Complicated and Conflicted Laws	3.19	.100
Unfamiliarity with Laws	3.35	.084
Poverty	3.79	.110

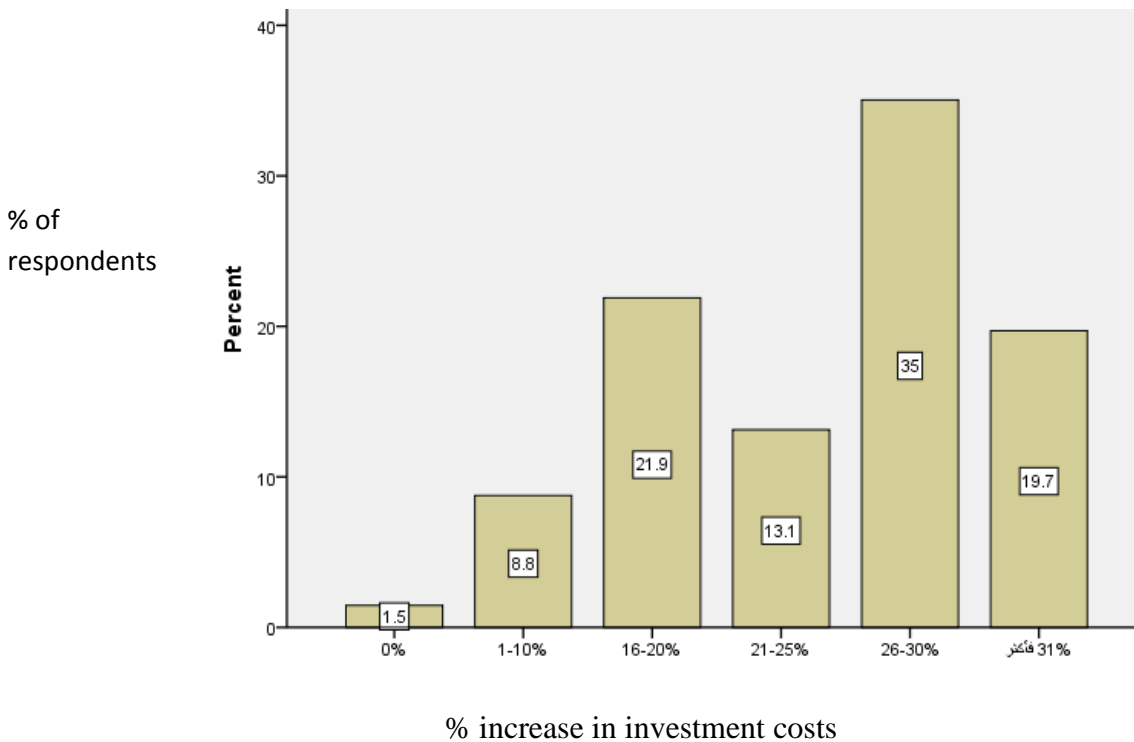


Main Effects of Corruption:

As shown in diagram (1), 35% of respondents affirmed that investment costs increased by 26–30%, as a result of corruption. 19.7% of respondents affirmed that investment cost sometimes increased by over 31% as a result of corruption.

Diagram (1)

Increase of Investment Costs Due to Corruption from 0% to 30%+



Ranking of Anti-Corruption Strategies:

Table (3) shows the most important social anti-corruption strategies, and ranks them as follows: first, obtaining the religious role in education; second, preparing suitable educational curricula; third, the media spreading knowledge and education; fourth, associations and unions*; and last, political parties*.

* Develop a spirit of collective cooperation among individuals.

* Political parties play a big role in increasing awareness and raising opinions especially in public opinion matters.



Table (3)

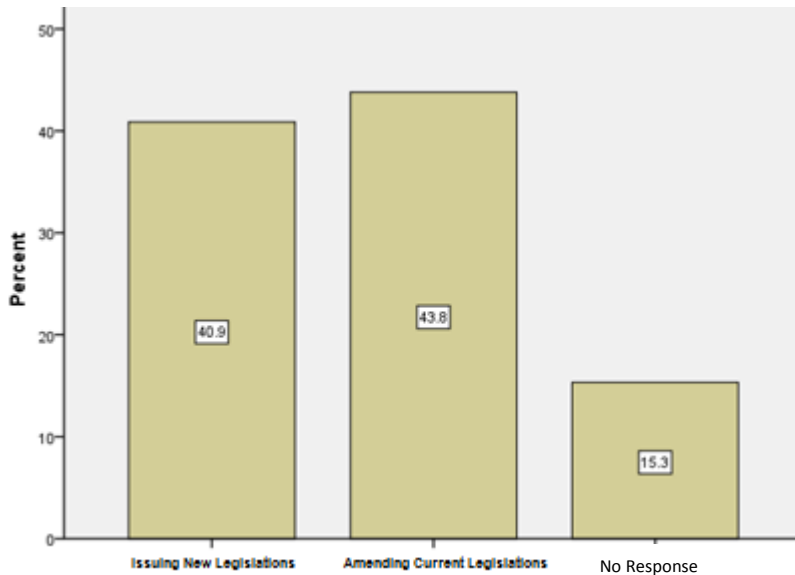
Ranking of Most Important Social Anti–Corruption Strategies:

Social Anti-Corruption Strategies	Average Arithmetic	Standard Error
Religious Role	1.89	.092
Educational Curricula	2.03	.103
Media	2.97	.085
Non-Governmental Associations and Unions	3.47	.079
Political Parties	4.59	.074

Diagram (2) illustrates respondents' opinions regarding the desired legislative approaches to advancing anti–corruption strategies. 43.8% of respondents affirmed that current laws should be amended. 40.9% of respondents affirmed that wholly new laws should be issued to fight corruption.

Diagram (2)

Ranking of the Most Important Legislative Approaches to Anti–Corruption



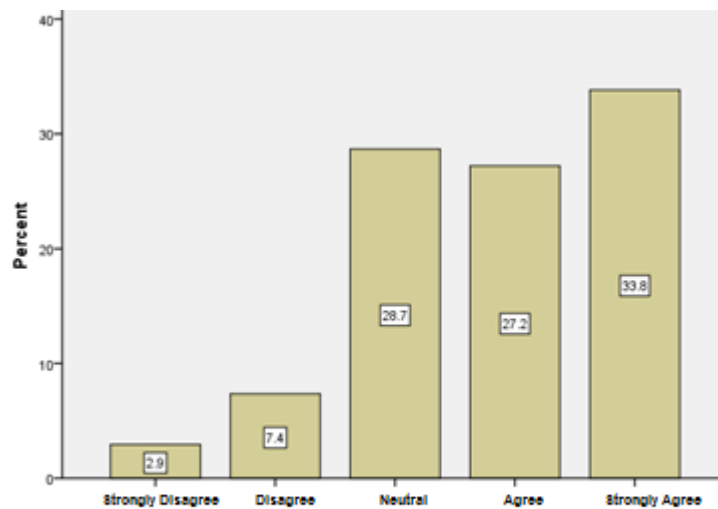


Democracy in Anti-Corruption:

Diagram (4) shows respondents' opinions of the most important anti-corruption strategies in the political realm. 61% of them confirmed that building democratic institutions suitable for a New Syria will eliminate corruption, while 10.1% said that it will not.

Diagram (4)

Will Building Democratic Institutions Eliminate Corruption?



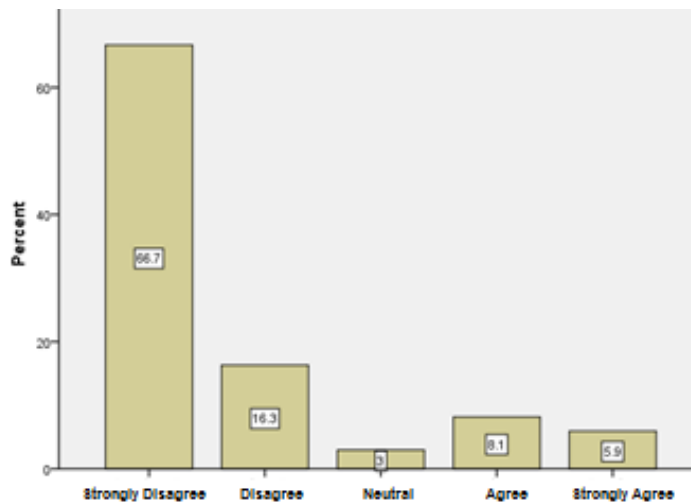
Mass Media's Role in Anti-Corruption

Diagram (5) reveals the role of mass media in fighting corruption. 83% of respondents affirmed that Syrian media did not participate in anti-corruption because it is politicized to serve the regime. Respondents agreed that mass media should be playing a highly effective role in fighting corruption.



Diagram (5)

Has the Official Media Contributed to Fighting Corruption?



Institutional Corruption in Syria:

Diagram (6) shows that 80.3% of the respondents affirmed that corruption is more widespread in public institutions than in the private sector.

Diagram (6)

Corruption More Widespread in Public Sector than Private Sector

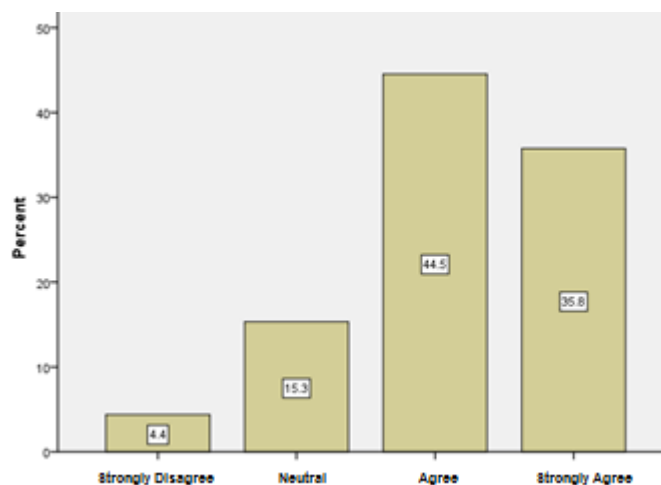
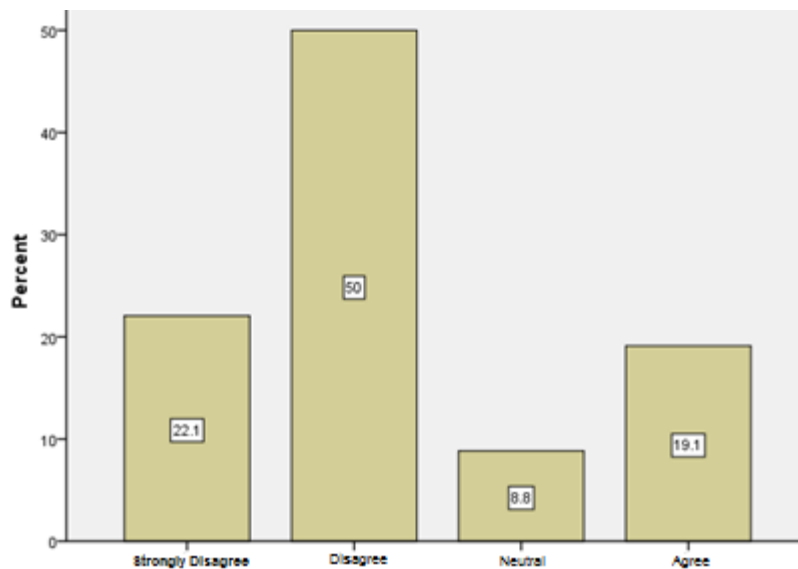




Diagram (7) shows that 77.1% of respondents affirmed their discomfort in dealing with public institutions due to widespread corruption.

Diagram (7)

Is Dealing with Public Institutions Easier than Private Sector Institutions?



Corruption in Public Institutions:

As noted in table (4), corruption is most prevalent in the following public institutions: security systems, the judiciary, licensing directorates, municipalities, economy directorates, customs, and finally the income, industry, and insurance directorates. We note that corruption exists in almost all public institutions, in different percentages.



Table (4)

Rankings of the Most Corrupt Public Institutions in Syria

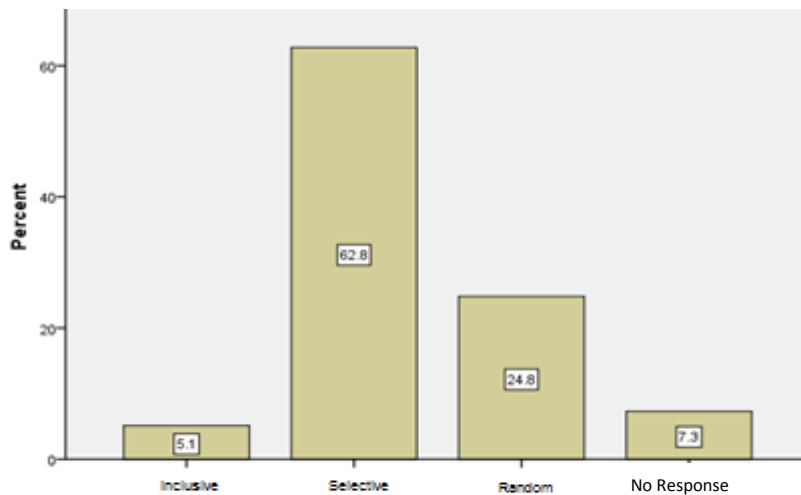
Corruption Places in Public Institutions	Average Arithmetic	Standard Error
Security Devices	1.61	.108
Judiciary	2.67	.170
Licensing Directorates	4.07	.151
Municipalities	4.54	.142
Economy Directorates	5.34	.160
Customs Directorates	5.68	.221
Income Directorates	6.26	.176
Industry Directorates	6.68	.159
Insurance Directorates	6.76	.167

Corruption Courts:

After this presentation on the prevalence of corruption in most public institutions, what is the role of corruption courts? As shown in diagram (8), 62.8% of respondents believe corruption courts are selective in prosecuting cases, while only 24.8% of the respondents believe that corruption courts prosecute cases impartially. Only 5.1% believe that corruption courts are fair in handling the cases they hear.

Diagram (8)

Nature of Corruption Courts





Procedures of Corruption Courts:

It is clear that corruption courts are selective in prosecuting cases, but why?

Respondents were asked: What is your evaluation of corruption courts' procedures in Syria? Table (5) shows that 85.4% affirmed violations due to pressures from security services, 7.3% affirmed that courts of corruption were conducted under pressures from the judiciary, and only 0.7% said that there were no pressures.

Table (5)

Procedures of Corruption Courts in Syria

Procedures of Corruption Courts in Syria	Number	Percentage
According to Law	1	.7
Violating the Law, under Pressure from Security Services	117	85.4
Violating the Law, under Pressure from Public Opinion	4	2.9
Violating the Law, under Pressure from Judiciary	10	7.3
Uncertain	5	3.6
Total	137	100.0

Dealing with Corruption Courts:

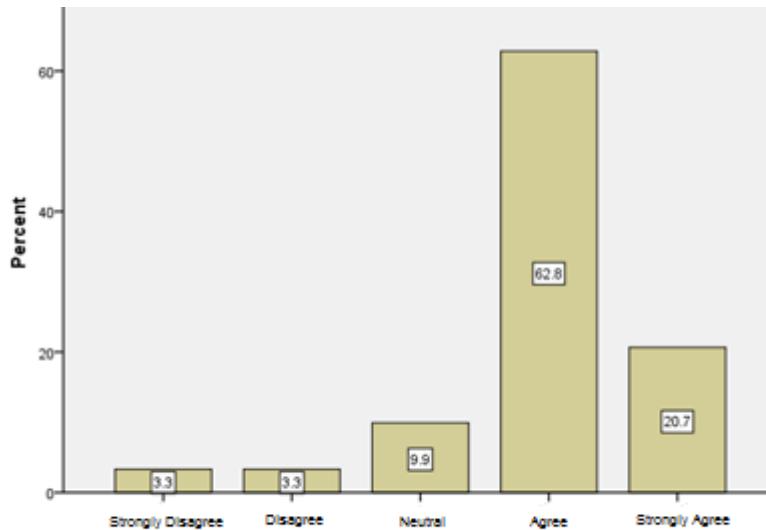
Diagram (9) shows that 83.5% of respondents affirmed that dealing with corruption courts that operate according to law would increase trust in public institutions.



Diagram (9)

Dealing with Corruption Courts Through Legal Means Increases

Trust in Governing System



Results and Recommendations:

Below, we present the most important results reached in this study, along with suitable recommendations.

Results:

In this study, we analyzed the results of a survey on corruption in Syria and revealed the reality of corruption in public institutions. Our main goal is to present the most important causes of corruption and advance effective anti-corruption strategies. Below are the most important results reached in this study.



- 1) The research shows that bribery is the most common and dangerous type of corruption in Syria.
- 2) Corruption increases business people's investment costs by 26–30% in Syria, which negatively affects citizens' costs and standards of living.
- 3) The public sector nourishes all kinds of corruption because of the authoritarian governing system. Governing in Syria is based on bribery and social, political, moral, and military payoffs. If measures were taken to fight corruption, it would be the end of the system. Thus, the measures the regime has taken were random, unconvincing, and impractical.
- 4) To be able to fight corruption there must be a holistic reform approach that includes religious, moral, educational, social, legal, and legislation measures to end it completely.
- 5) Mass media has not played any role in fighting corruption in Syria. Media coverage of corruption courts in Syria was not sufficient because the media is politicized in order to benefit the regime.

Recommendations:

In light of previous results, The Syrian Economic Forum offers the following recommendations:

- 1) Anti-corruption requires a long-term strategy, beginning with a social methodology to promote moral and religious education and awareness against illegal activity in general and corruption in particular.
- 2) It is essential to institute meritocratic employment. This includes basing job descriptions on objective selection criteria, establishing a system for



employee evaluation, and putting in place mechanisms for detecting and preventing deviance in career progression.

- 3) There must be laws and regulations that are clear, precise, and known to everyone inside public institutions, built on a cultural and democratic basis and away from red tape and bureaucracy.
- 4) Reliance on a clear and regulated methodology that is based on procedures to prevent professional deviance, such as facilitating procedures and making official processes more streamlined and efficient.
- 5) Raising citizens' living standards through a better environment for investment and increased employment in the private sector.
- 6) Corruption is the tyrant's fuel, and this is the case in Syria. Widespread corruption props up the criminal regime. Anti-corruption measures should include the creation of a neutral, just, and honest judiciary, as well as professional and powerful oversight bodies. The judiciary and oversight authorities should become an example of integrity, morality, honesty, and neutrality.
- 7) Activate the role of the media to become honest, transparent, powerful, and free from all restrictions in its coverage of corruption in public and private institutions.
- 8) The Syrian Economic Forum recommends an in-depth study of judicial corruption and current or new laws governing the corruption courts, in order to provide a more accurate picture of corruption in Syria.



Corruption Courts Questionnaire

There are many reasons behind the revolution. Demands varied by social, economic, and political revolutionary forces to include corruption courts. Political corruption and tyranny are the most common reasons behind the absence of social justice, which justifies why corruption courts and anti-corruption are considered as the cornerstone in efforts to build the new Syria.

Honorable Syrians, through your opinions, we can identify corruption types and techniques to fight and eliminate it in the future Syria. With many thanks, please fill out the below questionnaire. Looking forward to serve Syria through you.

- Gender: Male Female
- Age: Less than 20 years 21-23 31-40 41-50 More than 50 years
- Educational degree: Preparatory and less High School Institute College or more

No.	Phrase	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Corruption in public institutions is more than it is in the private sector.					
2	I feel comfortable in dealing with public institutions.					
3	Building democratic institutions eliminates corruption.					
4	Media coverage on corruption was good.					
5	Official media contributed in anti-corruption.					
6	Dealing with corruption courts increases trust in the government.					
7	Procedures of corruption courts in accordance to current laws eliminates corruption.					
8	When the revolutions wins, corruption courts will be eliminated or rarely happening					



- What is your opinion on corruption courts in Syria before the revolution?
 Inclusive Selective Random No opinion

- What is your evaluation of procedures through which corruption courts operated before the revolution?
 According to Law
 Violating the Law, under Pressures from Security Devices
 Violating the Law, under Pressures from Public Opinion
 Violating the Law, under Pressures from Judiciary
 No Opinion

- How to fight corruption socially?
Rank the following options: put numbers inside the circles.
 Educational curricula Religious Role
 Non-governmental associations and unions Media Parties
 No Opinion

- How to fight corruption legislatively?
 Issuing new legislations.
 Amending current legislations in accordance with the new Syria.
 No Opinion

- What are the most important directorates and departments in which corruption was spread?
Rank below options: put numbers inside the circles.
 Security devices. Judiciary. Licensing directorates (all types).
 Industry directorates. Economy directorates. Municipalities.
 Income directorates. Customs directorates. Insurance directorates.
 Other.

- What are the most important means of learning about corruption?
Rank below options: put numbers inside the circles.
 Official newspapers.
 Official TV channels.
 Non-official TV channels.
 Public opinion.



- Direct experience.
- Other.

– What are the most important causes of corruption's spread?

Rank below options: put numbers inside the circles.

- Unfamiliarity with Laws.
- Complicated and Conflicted Laws.
- Ineffective Control Systems.
- Poverty.
- Absence of religious role.
- Other.

– Corruption contributed in the increase of investment costs by a percentage of:

- 0%
- 1-10%
- 11-15%
- 16-20%
- 21-25%
- 26-30%
- 31% and more

Your suggestions...

And ideas about corruption courts and anti-techniques:

Thanks your for your cooperation