

Public Polling on Perceptions of Corruption in Liberia

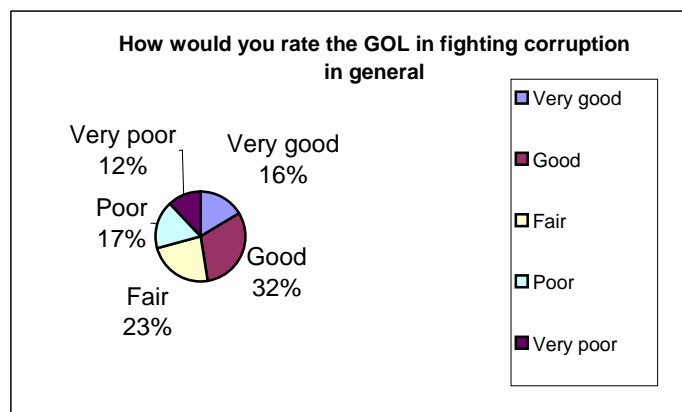
SFCG is an international NGO with a mission to transform the way the world deals with conflict, away from adversarial approaches towards cooperative solutions. In Liberia, SFCG operates Talking Drum Studio, a multi media production studio, and a complementary outreach project to strengthen participation and inclusion in consolidating peace in the country. One key area of focus has been supporting communication between the state and its citizens for improved accountability and transparency. To date SFCG has conducted a media mapping and a polling exercise on awareness and perceptions of the Government Economic Management Assistance Plan (GEMAP) to inform its own efforts as well as those of government, civil society, and the international community.

In February 2008, with support from the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), SFCG conducted a poll of Liberian citizens to gather information on their knowledge and perceptions of corruption. A total of 498 respondents from 10 separate locations, representing a cross section of Liberian society, were asked questions that pertained to their views of corruption. As the questions centered more on *what* people know and perceive rather than *whether* they know, the survey targeted urban areas served by radio as the residents there are more likely to be aware of government policies. Locations included Ganta, Gbarnga, Tubmanburg, Zwedru, Buchanan, and Voinjama and the Monrovia neighborhoods of Duport Road, Sinkor, and Westpoint.

The polling results showed that a vast majority of respondents feel the government is doing an adequate job of fighting corruption, while a significant minority believes current efforts are either unsatisfactory or above average. There is a strong relationship between higher ratings ("good" or better) for the government, more awareness of the Anti-Corruption Bill, and more trust of the courts to fight corruption. However, both the Anti-Corruption Bill and the courts suffer from a lack of public awareness and/or confidence. In addition, the incongruous results from the various surveyed locations point to the large role of local officials in fighting corruption and affecting public perception. Respondents from some locations felt very positive about the anti-corruption fight, while other locations were very pessimistic.

Specific findings of the polling on corruption revealed the following:

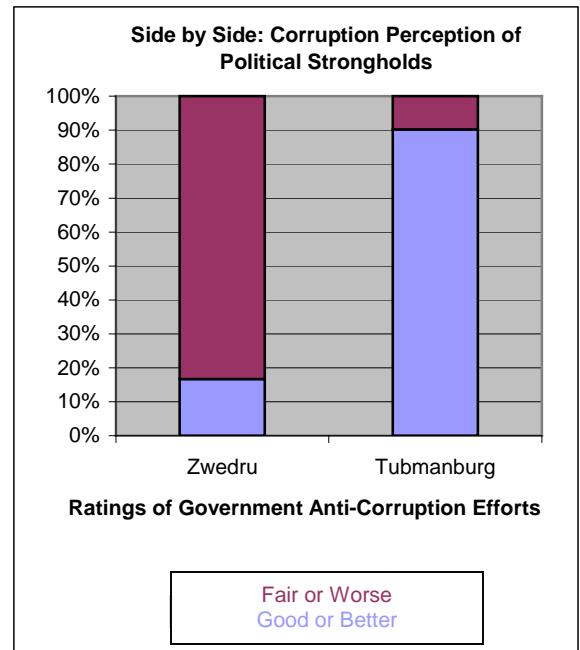
- While almost half of the respondents rated the Government of Liberia (GoL) as good or very good at fighting corruption, and 73% gave the GoL a "fair," "good" or "very good" rating, close to a third still believe its anti-corruption performance is unsatisfactory ("poor" or worse).
- When asked if they were aware of the Anti-Corruption Bill, a majority of respondents reported that they had never heard of the proposed legislation. The responses indicate that communication about this matter with the public has not been effective.



Is the GOL going after the right people in fighting corruption?	
YES	NO
210	284

- When asked if the GoL was targeting the appropriate people in its fight against corruption, a clear majority (57%) of respondents disagreed. While respondents find the GoL to be making adequate progress at fighting corruption, they also believe anti-corruption efforts have room for improvement and could be more effective if different people were targeted.

- Positive perceptions of GoL anti-corruption efforts exist in areas with a higher awareness of the Anti-Corruption Bill and related legislation. The notable exception is Tubmanburg, President Johnson Sirleaf’s home area, where 90% of respondents rated the GoL as “good” or better, a figure far surpassing any other location. The average of all areas indicated a 48% “good” or better rating, despite only 40% of all respondents reporting having heard of the Anti-Corruption Bill. However, less than 20% of respondents from Zwedru, an area of strong opposition to the current ruling political party, rated the government as “good” or better at fighting corruption. This is evidence that political loyalties strongly affect perceptions of corruption, more so than political awareness of actual anti-corruption measures. The politicization of such a key issue in Liberia is a potential obstacle to an inclusive and fair anti-corruption campaign.
- Most of those polled feel the courts cannot be trusted in an anti-corruption role, as 57% responded “no” to the question, “Do you trust the court in its role in fighting corruption?” Of those “no” respondents, a significant majority believe the courts are also susceptible to corruption in the form of bribery. These results indicate the public perception of courts as ineffective, not due to judicial system impotence, but due to the perception of corruption itself among those in the system. Whether or not the judicial system is, indeed, susceptible to corruption, the legitimacy and ability of the judicial system – in its role as upholder of law, mediator of conflicts, and promoter of good governance - is severely discredited as a result of these publicly held sentiments.
- In locations where more respondents express trust in the court system, the GoL rating was also correspondingly higher. Locations more aware of the Anti-Corruption Bill also tend to have higher trust of the courts’ ability to tackle corruption.
- In Zwedru and Ganta, both with below 20% “good” or better GoL ratings, trust of the courts is low, with only 5-10% of respondents reporting a sense of trust in the courts. While a generally negative view of the court system’s trustworthiness exists, the public considers trust-worthy, un-corrupt courts as necessary for GoL-led anti-corruption efforts to be successful.



It should be noted that the polling results merely identified correlations, not causal links. Follow-up, detailed polling is needed to identify causal links between GoL ratings, trust of courts, and anti-corruption bill awareness, and also to find the reasons for the variation in the responses between localities.

The information gathered during the polling will provide operational recommendations to SFCG on how to adjust and improve its media and outreach activities to foster effective, two-way communication between the government and its citizens.