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# Study of Anti-Corruption Ethics among Kazakhstani Youth: Media World's Possibilities

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**Abstract.** The article describes the vision statements of young Kazakhstanis, which allow us to study the moral phase of the corruption phenomenon through the analysis of behavioral responses to corruption situations. Study of the anticorruption ethics among young people is based on the results of a nationwide survey of Kazakhstan population conducted on the initiative of the Anticorruption Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, together with the Talap Center for Applied Research. Such a survey was aimed at the perceptual evaluation of corruption level in the country and the potential for integrity of the population. The results of the survey demonstrate a negative attitude toward corruption among the majority of the respondents. As well, they maintain a principled stand on bribery and believe that corruption largely hinders the full implementation of personal and professional activities. The study established the fact that the moral guidelines of the majority of the rising generation broadcast anti-corruption attitudes. In this regard, of particular interest is the role and power of the media in creating the ethical ideals among young Kazakhstanis in general and their anti-corruption worldview in particular. The article analyzes the possibilities of the media in the development of anti-corruption ethics and behavior among the population.

**Keywords:** youth, ethics, corruption, anti-corruption ethics, attitudes, media, social research.

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### Introduction

Corruption is one of the most dangerous systemic threats not only to the economic and political security of the Republic of Kazakhstan but also to the moral foundations of society, destroying the worldview and spirituality of the younger generation. From the traditional point of view, corruption is perceived as a social evil that is rooted in the imperfection of the social structure. At the same time, one cannot deny the fact that this imperfection is based on some anomalies of the moral nature of man. It is in bribery that the social and the individual pass into each other, thus forming a single symbiosis. And in this sense, corruption is a universal and, in some way, irremovable phenomenon. American researchers Arnold A. Rogow and Harold D. Lasswell noted that when we look into corruption in the political and administrative system of a society, we should recognize that corruption is more or less inherent to any society and can be considered as a part of the real system (*Rogow*, 2005).

In January 2021, Transparency International, an international organization dedicated to combating corruption, released its annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) for the year 2020. According to the report, Kazakhstan received a score of 38 points, ranking 94th globally. The country shared this position with Brazil, Ethiopia, Peru, Serbia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, and Tanzania (Kazakhstan climbs 19 positions in Transparency International's CPI, 2021).

The Republic of Kazakhstan sets the task of countering corruption as a priority in state policy at the present stage. But despite the measures taken by state authorities and society, corruption is still dangerous to the normal functioning of social mechanisms and the modernization of the Kazakhstan economy. Besides, corruption causes distrust among the population in the institutions of government, thus hindering the implementation of social transformations.

Within the framework of Kazakhstan's societal transformation, the youth represent the most mobile and rapidly adapting socio-demographic group. Due to their age characteristics and relatively "marginal" social status, they are particularly sensitive to changes in their environment. As a driving force of progress, young people play a key role in unlocking the socio-cultural and socio-economic potential of the state. Their ability to adjust swiftly to new social realities enables them to spearhead processes of sociocultural transformation within society.

According to popular opinion, the youth group belongs to people in the 14-30 age bracket. These boundaries are quite flexible, conditional, and depend on the socio-economic and historical context, as well as certain personal qualities and key events in the life of an individual. Nevertheless, sociologists, demographers, and psychologists agree that most people complete the process of life self-determination and get a stable position in the system of social relations and economic independence by the age of 30.

Youth perceive corruption as illegal use by officials holding responsible public positions of material benefits and advantages for themselves or third parties, extracting personally or through intermediaries, as well as bribing others by providing benefits and advantages (*Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, On combating corruption, 2015*).

The initiatives undertaken by Kazakhstan's leadership, including stricter anti-corruption measures, the digitalization of public services, and support programs for the population and businesses during the pandemic, have been positively received by the global community. However,

international experts also highlight concerns regarding violations of democratic freedoms. These include a lack of transparency in financial reporting on healthcare expenditures, unjustified restrictions on journalists, human rights defenders, and civil society representatives. Despite ongoing efforts, Kazakhstan remains among the countries most vulnerable to corruption (Four anti-corruption recommendations relevant for Kazakhstan, 2021).

However, corruption has not reached an alarming scale in all countries. For instance, nations such as Switzerland, Denmark, the Scandinavian countries, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Thailand have either eradicated corruption at its core or keep it firmly under state control. The key to their success in combating corruption lies largely in the deeply rooted moral values within society and the ethical integrity of individuals.

Morality encompasses a society's shared beliefs about good and evil, right and wrong, as well as the behavioral norms derived from these principles (New Encyclopedic Dictionary, 2006). In this context, anti-corruption ethics can be defined as the moral stance of an individual who rejects corruption as a societal ill – one that fosters injustice, inequality, greed, dishonesty, shamelessness, impunity, arrogance, and other negative traits.

At the same time, some individuals do not adhere to these moral standards. They operate based on their own interpretations of justice, responsibility, humanism, honor, dignity, and duty. It is not that their actions necessarily contradict moral norms, but rather that they possess the ability to construct a personal sense of moral comfort in situations where others might experience pangs of conscience – such as disappointment, remorse, regret, or shame. Corruption, like any other crime, has persisted for millennia because it continues to be rationalized through certain moral justifications.

### **Data and Methods**

To study the anti-corruption ethics of Kazakhstan youth, we turned to the results of a large-scale survey of the population conducted at the end of 2019 on the initiative of the Anti-Corruption Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan to evaluate the perception of the corruption level in the country and the potential for integrity of citizens. The survey was carried out by Talap Center for Applied Research using a special mobile app "Talap. Surveys" using a random sample of respondents throughout Kazakhstan. The reliability of data identification about the respondents was confirmed through a mobile device (by IMEI), registration (via SMS), and geolocation (Report on anti-corruption monitoring to identify areas most prone to corruption based on the results of 2019, 2020).

The object of the study was the population of the Republic of Kazakhstan aged 18 years and older.

The subject of the study was the attitude of the population to the situation around corruption in Kazakhstan, assessment of the citizens' potential to participate in anti-corruption policies, and their integrity, i.e., integrity here means the development of an anti-corruption model of behavior in the society.

The study covered 58,336 Kazakhstan citizens from 17 regions of Kazakhstan, 52% of whom are women and 48% are men. The level of education of the respondents: 72% have higher

Gumilyov Journal of Sociology ISSN: 3080-1702 education, 13.4% have specialized secondary education, 11.2% have secondary education, 2.9% have an academic degree, and 0.6% have primary education.

Study results were analyzed through mathematical treatment of data, its systematization (calculation of answer options distribution), as well as visualization – a visual representation in the form of tables and diagrams.

Whole composition of the survey questionnaire for the respondent includes three parts: introductory, main and reference. The introductory part of the questionnaire outlines the purpose and objectives of the study, describes how the results of the survey will be used, guarantees the anonymity of information about the respondent, and also indicates the rules for filling out the questionnaire.

The main part of the questionnaire consists of four blocks of questions aimed at obtaining the necessary information from respondents, including: "Assessment of the level of perception of corruption", "Attitude towards corruption", "Awareness of anti-corruption measures", and "Citizens' integrity potential".

The reference part at the end of the questionnaire contains questions aimed at obtaining information about the respondent (gender, age, region of residence, education, kind of activity).

Thus, the questionnaire consists of 35 questions, 26 of which are closed questions, 8 are semi-closed, and 1 is open.

From a methodological perspective, this study is grounded in V.A. Yadov's dispositional concept of personality (*Yadov*, 1979), which lies at the intersection of sociology and psychology. This framework explores an individual's cognitive, emotional, and behavioral predispositions ("dispositions") that shape their responses to different social conditions. In other words, it examines psychological tendencies that influence a person's readiness to engage in specific activities within particular social contexts. Thus, the value level of public consciousness in the hierarchy of dispositions seems to be strategically important for assessing the attitude of the population towards corruption.

## **Results and Discussions**

It should be noted that one of the objectives of the study was to compare and identify the difference in the perception of the corruption level in the country by youth and adult respondents. The young respondents were people aged 18 to 30. This age range was defined in accordance with the official classification of youth in the Republic of Kazakhstan valid in 2019, which considered individuals up to the age of 30 inclusive as youth. In addition, surveying individuals under the age of 18 without the written consent of parents or legal guardians is prohibited by current legislation governing sociological research involving minors. Therefore, the sample was limited exclusively to adult participants.

In total, 52% of respondents aged 18 to 30 took part in the survey. The results of the study showed that respondents of the young generation have the same opinion as older respondents about the situation with corruption in the country. Thus, the results of the survey described below demonstrate the general attitude of the young and older population towards the situation with corruption in Kazakhstan.

Since in our study we are interested in studying the moral phase of the corruption phenomenon, we will focus on describing the respondents' answers to those questions that allow us to study their anti-corruption ethics more detailed.

According to the survey results, only 1/3 of the respondents assess the level of corruption in the country as 'high', while 2/3 of the respondents assess the level of corruption in the country as 'medium' and 'low' (Fig. 1).

37.5% 40.0% 35.0% 30.0% 23.1% 25.0% 17.6% 20.0% 12.4% 15.0% 9.4% 10.0% 5.0% 0.0% Medium Extremely high Likely high Likely low Extremely low

Fig. 1 What do you think is the level of corruption in the country now?

In particular, more than half of the respondents (54%) noted that the situation with corruption in the country improved over the past 3 years (Fig. 2).

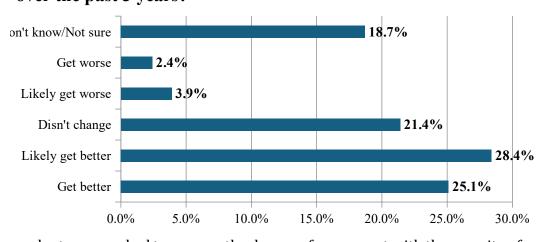


Fig. 2 How has the situation with corruption in the country changed over the past 3 years?

Respondents were asked to express the degree of agreement with the severity of punishment for a corruption offense and gave a hypothetical example with a possible outcome after reading out a sentence in the court: "Imagine that an official was punished for a corruption offense (taking a bribe up to 300,000 Tenge), the sentence is: a fine and 3 years of restriction of liberty with deprivation of the right to hold public office." Such a question indirectly makes it possible to assess the mood of Kazakhstanis regarding the liberalization of the punishment policy for corruption offenses.

As a result, the majority of respondents agreed with the verdict, and every sixth respondent considers such a punishment too mild. This indicates a low degree of tolerance for corruption offenses, especially on the part of officials (Fig. 3).

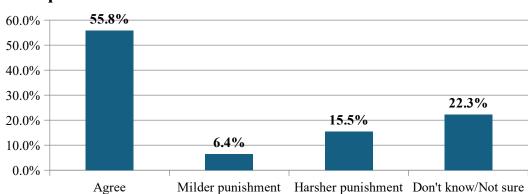


Fig. 3 Do you agree with the degree of severity of punishment for a corruption?

To the question 'Should those who give bribes be punished?' 76.9% of respondents answered positively. At the same time, most of them believe that the punishment in this case for such persons should be the same as for those who take bribes, and every fourth respondent believes that bribe givers should be punished more severely than bribe takers (Fig. 4).

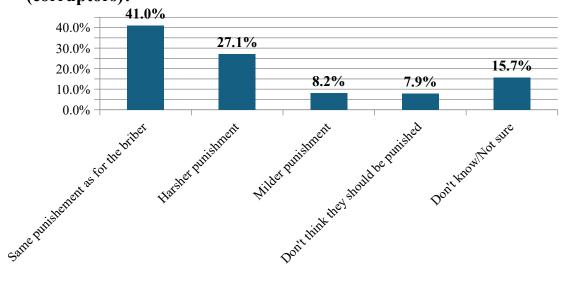


Fig. 4 What punishment should get those people who give bribes (corruptors)?

Speaking about the ability of citizens to participate in anti-corruption policy, it should be noted that the study showed that 63% of respondents are ready to take part in anti-corruption activities, including as a volunteer (30.8%).

The survey results showed that the majority of Kazakhstanis have a negative attitude toward corruption as a social phenomenon. At the same time, the negative attitude towards corruption

is more clearly pronounced among representatives of the civil service, employees of the public sector, and the quasi-public sector (Fig. 5).

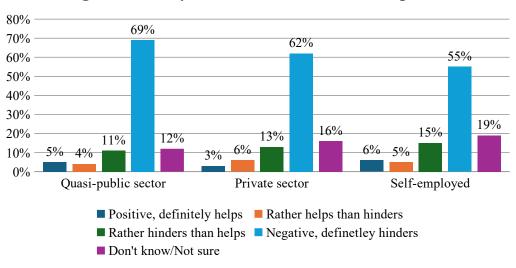


Fig. 5 What is your attitude towards corruption?

In total, 73.7% of respondents expressed their negative attitude towards corruption and believe that corruption in the country, to a large extent, hinders the full implementation of personal and professional activities (Fig. 6).

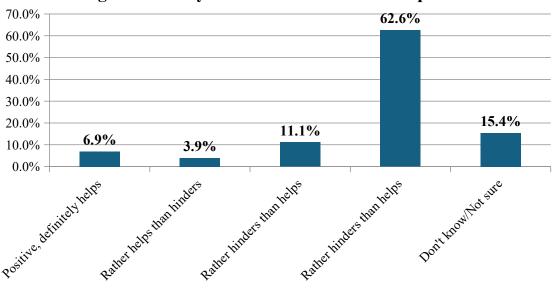


Fig. 6 What is your attitude towards corruption?

An important result of the study was the confirmation of the fact that the moral guidelines of Kazakhstan population broadcast anti-corruption attitudes. Personal attitudes towards corruption based on the idea that bribes are bad are held by 62% of citizens. Thus, the majority adhere to a principled ground on the issue of bribery.

The study of the moral aspect of the corruption phenomenon becomes extremely relevant in the Kazakhstan society when discussing the development of an intolerant attitude to corruption on the part of youth. The Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2015-2025 approved by Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 986 on December 26, 2014, states the following: "The key role in this is played by the nurturing the younger generation with new views and life principles that do not allow them to tolerate corruption. For this purpose, it is important to engrain anti-corruption values through training and education from childhood, at all stages of development and formation of the individual. Issues of integrity and anti-corruption culture should be included in the education system" (*The Anti-Corruption Strategy of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2015–2025, 2014*).

Instilling an anti-corruption mindset among young people can be effectively achieved through examples of lawful and ethical behavior that emphasize integrity, honesty, and conscientiousness. Such an educational approach helps youth understand that corruption is not a solution but merely an easy, yet illegitimate, path that ultimately leads to negative consequences.

Education of anti-corruption values among the younger generation within the highereducation system can be both formal and informal. Formal education includes learning by students of compulsory disciplines that form an anti-corruption worldview, while informal education is implemented through the organization and holding of such extracurricular activities as round tables, promotions, conferences, etc.

Unfortunately, in practice, the implementation of formal anti-corruption measures in the educational system often becomes a pedagogical and organizational task. Teaching staff develop numerous methodological recommendations which, as a rule, do not contain information about those features of everyday vision of corruption that are already formed among Kazakhstan youth.

And at the same time, the developers of such methodological recommendations do not always take into account those peculiarities that are inherent in the minds of young people. Youth represent the most energetic, dynamic, and rapidly evolving segment of society. It is within this group that new perspectives, innovative ideas, and advanced technologies emerge and are put into practice. As the driving force behind future development, the younger generation shapes the direction of societal progress. A prosperous future depends on their active social and civic engagement, including a strong commitment to combating corruption in all its forms and at every level.

Contemporary youth can, among other things, be characterized by a significant distortion in their sense of justice, which results in the perception that corruption is a common and normal occurrence in their country. This distortion, found in some young people who grew up during the economic, political, and cultural reforms over the 30 years of Kazakhstan's independence, can be referred to as legal nihilism.

As for informal anti-corruption education, there is the following trend: many extracurricular activities regarding the development of an anti-corruption worldview are mainly aimed at enriching and accumulating students' theoretical knowledge, but do not encourage them to be guided by the law in case of their own selfish gain. Mainly this is because of the fact that, along with anti-corruption education in universities, students receive the opposite idea of corruption from the media, which often not only highlights an inefficient work of the public sector in anti-corruption efforts but also promotes illegal activities.

It should be noted that in modern reality, the mass media has its special role in the informal formation of moral ideals among the younger generation in general and their anti-corruption worldview in particular. Mass media, so-called the 'fourth power', today act as a powerful tool for the development of public consciousness, attitudes and interests. A distinctive feature of the media sources is that through this institution, the state can influence the mass consciousness of the population, prompting them to commit certain actions or inaction. Therefore, one cannot ignore the huge power and potential of the media world, which can be directed to anti-corruption education of the younger generation.

### **Conclusions**

The capabilities of the media world for the development of anti-corruption ethics and behavior are as follows:

- 1. informing the public about prompt and effective ways of interacting with state bodies and public institutions on combating manifestations of corruption;
- 2. clear and transparent communication about state bodies' activities and the ways of interacting with them, which will positively affect the effectiveness of feedback from the population;
- 3. highlighting the success of past positive experiences in the implementation of anticorruption policy and practice in the fight against corruption at the regional, state and international levels;
- 4. informing about the results of research aimed at studying modern forms of corruption and combating them;
- 5. promotion of a negative attitude towards corruption through the demonstration of materials on the strict punishment of corrupt officials and persons involved in any corruption crime;
- 6. promotion of anti-corruption behavior patterns and socially acceptable ways for youth to achieve the desired goals.

Thus, the general task of the media world in the development of anti-corruption ethics is to inform the public that corruption is not a way of quick and mutually beneficial interaction between individual entities but a real crime that entails negative consequences not only for participants in the corruption scheme in particular but also poses a threat to the state development as a whole. At the same time, the mass media need to create an atmosphere of intolerance towards corruption among the youth which will lead not only to anti-corruption behavior of the young people but also to the development of an anti-corruption worldview.

In 2025, the authors plan to conduct a follow-up study on integrity and perceptions of corruption in the country, specifically targeting student youth. The anticipated research will provide an empirical foundation for a subsequent publication within the scope of this thematic area.

**Authors' contributions: G.M. Burakanova** played a leading role in defining the design of the study and writing the article. **A.A. Maimakova** contributed to the collection, processing, and analysis of data and performed a literature review on the topic of the study. **A.G. Orazgaliyeva** 

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was the coordinator of the research project at the Center for Applied Research "Talap". N.O. Baigabylov made a substantial contribution to the study design.

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# Қазақстандық жастар арасында сыбайлас жемқорлыққа қарсы этиканы қалыптастыру: медиаәлемінің ықпалы

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада жас қазақстандықтардың сыбайлас жемқорлық жағдайларына мінезқұлықтық реакциясы арқылы бұл құбылыстың моральдық қырын зерттеуге мүмкіндік беретін көзқарастары сипатталады. Жастар арасындағы сыбайлас жемқорлыққа қарсы этиканы зерттеу Қазақстан Республикасы Сыбайлас жемқорлыққа қарсы іс-қимыл агенттігінің бастамасымен және «Талап» қолданбалы зерттеулер орталығымен бірлесіп жүргізілген ұлттық сауалнама нәтижелеріне негізделген. Бұл сауалнама қоғамдағы жемқорлықты қабылдау деңгейі мен азаматтардың адалдық әлеуетін бағалауға бағытталған. Зерттеу нәтижелері респонденттердің басым бөлігінің сыбайлас жемқорлыққа теріс көзқараста екенін көрсетті. Сондай-ақ, олар парақорлыққа түбегейлі қарсы болып, сыбайлас жемқорлық жеке және кәсіби дамуға елеулі кедергі келтіреді деп есептейді. Зерттеу нәтижесінде өскелең ұрпақтың көпшілігінің моральдық бағдарлары сыбайлас жемқорлыққа қарсы ұстанымдарды қолдайтыны анықталды. Осыған байланысты жастардың жалпы адамгершілік құндылықтары мен сыбайлас жемқорлыққа қарсы көзқарастарын қалыптастыруда бұқаралық ақпарат құралдарының рөлі мен ықпалы ерекше қызығушылық тудырады. Мақалада медиа құралдарының халық арасында сыбайлас жемқорлыққа қарсы этика мен мінез-құлықты дамытудағы мүмкіндіктері талданады.

**Негізгі ұғымдар:** жастар, этика, сыбайлас жемқорлық, сыбайлас жемқорлыққа қарсы этика, ұстанымдар, медиа, әлеуметтік зерттеу.

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# Формирование антикоррупционной этики у казахстанской молодежи: влияние медиапространства

Аннотация. В статье представлены взгляды казахстанской молодежи, позволяющие изучить моральный аспект коррупции через анализ поведенческих реакций на коррупционные ситуации. Исследование антикоррупционной этики среди молодежи основывается на данных общенационального социологического опроса населения Казахстана, проведенного по инициативе Агентства по противодействию коррупции Республики Казахстан совместно с Центром прикладных исследований «Талап». Опрос был направлен на выявление восприятия уровня коррупции в стране и потенциала граждан к добропорядочности. Результаты показали негативное отношение большинства респондентов к коррупции. Молодежь занимает принципиальную позицию по отношению к взяточничеству и считает, что коррупция значительно препятствует личной и профессиональной самореализации. Установлено, что моральные ориентиры большинства представителей молодого поколения транслируют антикоррупционные установки. В этой связи особый интерес представляет роль и влияние медиа в формировании этических идеалов у казахстанской молодежи в целом и антикоррупционного мировоззрения, в частности. В статье анализируются возможности медиа в развитии антикоррупционной этики и поведения среди населения.

**Ключевые слова:** молодежь, этика, коррупция, антикоррупционная этика, установки, медиа, социальное исследование.

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