

Russians Lose Hope That State Can Tackle Corruption, Transparency Says

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World Map of the Corruption Perceptions Index: in blue are the countries with less corruption, in red the ones with more corruption.

Russians believe that the level of corruption in the country has gone up over the last two years despite government efforts to fight it and that graft has become one of society's worst afflictions, Transparency International's Russia office said.

The international anti-corruption watchdog drew its conclusions from surveys with around 1,000 Russians conducted as part of its [Global Corruption Barometer](#), a report on which it released Tuesday.

Half of survey respondents said they believed the level of corruption in Russia had increased, with 37 percent saying it had worsened "significantly," while 77 percent of Russians said they thought government efforts to fight graft were ineffective.

"The spread of and the attitude toward corruption can be interpreted as the blood pressure of society. In Russia, it has begun to be seen as the highest form of social injustice and potentially the main trigger for protests," said Yuly Nisnevich, professor of political science at the Higher School of Economics and a board member at Transparency's Russia office, at a news conference Tuesday.

Over the last decade, the Russian government has made numerous vows to root out corruption and has acknowledged it as the main obstacle to institutional development in the country. In President Vladimir Putin's most recent TV question-and-answer session with the public in April, he vowed to "kill it off."

But Russians seem to think the efforts have rarely gone beyond highly publicized investigations into fraud at state agencies, such as those involving the alleged embezzlement of hundreds of millions of dollars from Defense Ministry companies. After one such inquiry was opened last year, then-Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov was fired from his job.

During Dmitry Medvedev's presidency, the government also made corruption a focus, unleashing a massive reform of the police service. As part of the effort, all police officers underwent a "recertification" process to cull the most dishonest, with as many as 20 percent of them being kicked out, and a name change saw the long-time "militsia" change to "politsia" as part of an image revamp.

The Transparency survey released Tuesday indicates that these efforts have had little effect. The percentage of those polled who view the police force as corrupt has gone up and 66 percent called it "very corrupt."

Overall, Russia remains near the basement compared to the rest of the world in terms of perceptions about corruption — it ranked 133rd out of 176 countries last year in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, a place it shares with Iran and Kazakhstan, among others.

According to anti-corruption experts, one way to address the situation would be for Russia to ratify Article 20 of the UN Convention Against Corruption, which makes officials criminally liable if they are unable to explain how they acquired their assets.

Article 20 makes officials liable even if it isn't proven that they took a bribe or were guilty of some other corrupt act. Nisnevich said this is a natural requirement for public figures, who "have to assume a special kind of responsibility before society."

But Russian lawmakers have been of a different opinion, saying the presumption of innocence enshrined in the Russian Constitution makes it impossible to ratify Article 20 of the UN convention.

Instead, Putin has pushed through legislation that forces officials to explain any extravagant expenses and a law barring officials from having foreign bank accounts.

Members of the State Duma's Security and Anti-Corruption Committee were unable to be reached for comment Tuesday on the Transparency International report.

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