Understanding Government Corruption and Bribes in One-page

CORRUPTION – Three levels of definition from general to specific.

1. MOST GENERAL – Corruption: the use of power entrusted to you for the benefit of others for your private gain.

2. MORE SPECIFIC – Government Corruption: the use of government power for private gain (all types of private gain).


GFC is both the most common and most destructive type of corruption for a society. Numerous studies have demonstrated that the level of political and economic development of a nation is usually proportional to the level of government financial corruption (GFC) in that society.

Government Bribe (n): Something of value offered to or received by a government official in return for not performing what their governmental duty requires.
(A bribe is defined by the motive not the actual outcome.)

Bribery (v): offering bribes to government officials - vs - Extortion (v): government officials asking for bribes

Note: Systematic government financial corruption (GFC) is a continuous dance between bribery and extortion—two sides of the same corruption coin.

The Spectrum of Types of Bribes

1→ ______________________________________________________ ←1

“Money Bribes”
Specific Exchange Bribe based on a transaction
Identified, agreed upon transaction / relationship ends with the transaction - vs - unspecified obligation / gifts and favors used to create ongoing relationship

“Gift Bribes”
General Obligation Bribe based on a relationship

It is a spectrum and many of the most damaging bribes to a society are found in the middle part of the spectrum where a bribe is a mixture of the gift bribe and the money bribe (e.g. a construction company makes a large campaign contribution—initial gift bribe to create a relationship. On his birthday, the newly elected Governor receives a bottle of Scotch from president of the construction company. A year later there is an unexpected need for a major emergency road repair. The Governor directs the contract to the construction company even though it is not the lowest bidder—the general obligation turns into a specific transaction.)

To Fight Money Bribes – Punish the transaction - vs - To Fight Gift Bribes – Prohibit the gift or favor (eventual transactions too difficult to detect or prove)

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