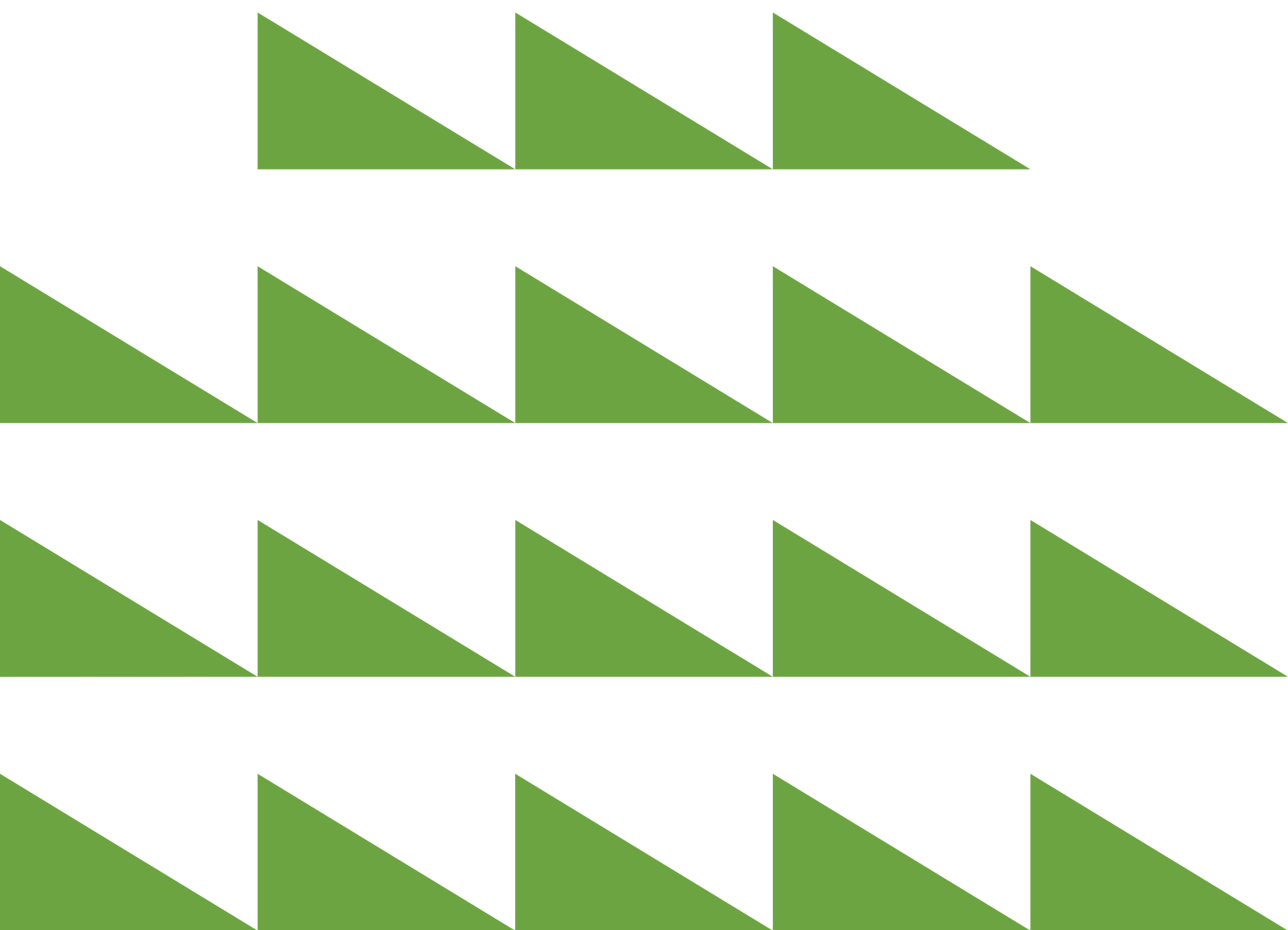


Perceptions of corruption

Survey of the **Victorian community**

April 2018



Authorised and published by the
Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission,
Level 1, 459 Collins Street, Melbourne

April 2018

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ISBN 978-0-6482992-1-9 (print)
ISBN 978-0-6482992-0-2 (online)

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1 Overview

The Victorian community expects the public sector to operate fairly and honestly, free from misconduct and corruption. The community also expects public sector employees to conduct themselves with integrity and professionalism when using public funds and resources to deliver goods and services to Victorians.

This report provides the responses of the Victorian community about their understanding of corruption, their perceptions of corruption and misconduct, attitudes to reporting corruption and misconduct, and attitudes towards preventing corruption.

Corruption is never a victimless crime. Public sector corruption not only damages the good reputation of the public sector but also robs the community of public funds that should be allocated for the benefit of all citizens to fund schools, hospitals, transport and other vital community services.

Since becoming fully operational in early 2013, the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission (IBAC) has exposed cases of serious and systemic corruption at senior levels in the Victorian public sector.

In 2016, IBAC engaged research company Urbis to conduct research on perceptions of corruption in the Victorian community. Employees from state and local government, Victoria Police and the broader community were surveyed.¹ Separate reports on these survey results are available on the IBAC website.

Methodology

Community respondents were recruited in late 2016, with quotas applied to ensure the sample included a mix of age groups (18–34, 35–49, 50–65, 66 and over), genders and locations (metropolitan or regional).

Responses were received from 1236 members of the Victorian community. As this was not a random sample, caution should be exercised when generalising the results to the broader Victorian community.

Major differences between the results from community respondents, and other respondent groups (namely state government, local government and Victoria Police employees) are noted where relevant.

The results are also compared with the findings of other research of the Victorian community's perception of corruption conducted by IBAC in 2013 and 2015. However, the methodology and scope of these research projects varied.²

¹ The survey of community members differed slightly from the survey of state and local government employees and Victoria Police employees in a small number of questions, reflecting the fact that the community respondents were not necessarily drawing on employment experience to answer questions.

² In 2012/13, IBAC engaged the Australian National University to conduct a survey of Australian community members about their perceptions of corruption and reporting corruption. That study involved 2020 respondents, including 505 respondents from Victoria. In 2015, IBAC engaged Empirica to conduct a survey of Victorian community members about their awareness of IBAC and perceptions of corruption. That study involved 1082 Victorian respondents.

1.1 Key findings

The research focused on four areas:

- understanding corruption
- perceptions of corruption and misconduct
- attitudes towards reporting corruption and misconduct
- perceptions and attitudes towards integrity and preventing corruption.

Two-thirds of the Victorian community respondents agreed they knew what behaviour constitutes corruption (65 per cent). Almost two-thirds of community respondents also agreed that *corruption happens in Victoria* (62 per cent), which was comparable to the other groups surveyed (state and local government employees and Victoria Police).

Behaviours associated with obtaining personal financial rewards and bribery were consistently identified as corruption by the majority of community respondents. However, compared with other respondent groups, community respondents were less confident identifying what corruption is. While less than half of the community respondents (44 per cent) identified a *government employee using a work credit card to pay for a personal taxi fare of \$50* as corrupt conduct, the majority of Victoria Police, state government and local government respondents were clear that this definitely involved corrupt conduct.

The majority of community respondents said they would report corruption if they personally observed it (75 per cent), however only a quarter of respondents said they knew how to report corruption (23 per cent) or where to report it (24 per cent).

Community respondents stated that concern for fairness and democracy (78 per cent) and the best interests of the community (77 per cent) would prompt them to report corruption.

And they were most likely to report serious corruption to IBAC (39 per cent), the Victorian Ombudsman (21 per cent) and Victoria Police (15 per cent).

2 Understanding corruption

Community members surveyed were asked about their understanding of corruption and the extent to which they believe it happens in Victoria.

2.1 Where does corruption happen?

Two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent) agreed they know *what constitutes 'corruption'*. In comparison, a larger proportion of Victoria Police, local government and state government respondents stated they knew *what constitutes 'corruption'*.³ The higher level of confidence in police and public service respondents is understandable, as they are required to comply with standards or codes of conduct which set out obligations for behaving with honesty and integrity.

Two-thirds of community respondents also agreed that *corruption happens in Victoria* (62 per cent), which is comparable with Victoria Police, state government and local government respondents.⁴

Nine per cent of community respondents did not believe that corruption is a problem in Victoria. This compares with IBAC's 2015 research, where three per cent of respondents believed corruption had no impact on Victoria.

A slightly larger proportion of police, state and local government respondents held the view that corruption is not a problem in Victoria.⁵

TABLE 1: COMMUNITY UNDERSTANDING OF CORRUPTION

	Disagree (%)	Neither disagree nor agree (%)	Agree (%)
I know what constitutes 'corruption'	4	32	65
Corruption is a problem in Victoria	9	49	42
Corruption happens in Victoria	4	34	62

Base: Total sample, n = 1236. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

³ Ninety per cent of Victoria Police, 79 per cent of state government and 84 per cent of local government respondents agreed that they knew *what constitutes 'corruption'*.

⁴ Sixty-three per cent of Victoria Police, 59 per cent of state government and 56 per cent of local government respondents agreed that *corruption happens in Victoria*.

⁵ Twenty-six per cent of Victoria Police, 14 per cent of state government and 12 per cent of local government respondents disagreed that *corruption is a problem in Victoria*.

3 Perceptions of corruption

People surveyed were presented with a number of scenarios and asked to indicate whether they believed those scenarios involved corruption.

3.1 Identifying corruption

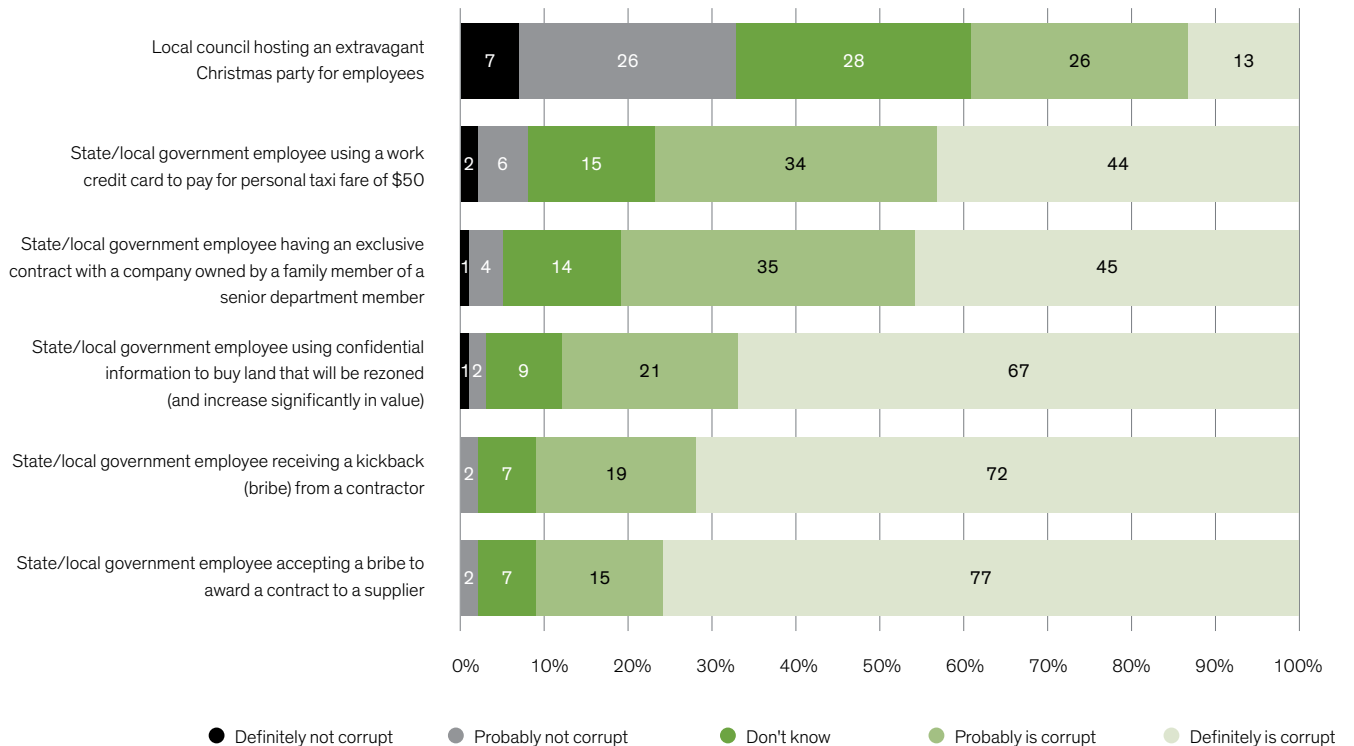
Financial rewards and bribes were identified as corrupt conduct by the majority of the respondents:

- Seventy-seven per cent of respondents identified a state/local government employee accepting a bribe to award a contract to a supplier as a corrupt behaviour.
- Seventy-two per cent of respondents identified a state/local government employee receiving a kickback (bribe) from a contractor as a corrupt behaviour.

The use of confidential information to buy land that will subsequently be rezoned (and increase significantly in value) was the only other scenario identified as corrupt conduct by the majority of respondents (67 per cent).

Overall, community respondents were less confident in their identification of corrupt behaviours, with at least seven per cent stating they did not know whether a scenario involved corrupt conduct. This is shown in Figure 1. In general, Victoria Police, state government and local government respondents were more confident in their identification of corrupt behaviours. For instance, nine per cent of community respondents thought the two scenarios involving kickbacks or bribes were probably not corrupt conduct, or they did not know. This compares with approximately two per cent of police and public service respondents who did not know.

FIGURE 1: PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION BEHAVIOURS – CORRUPT OR NOT?



Base: Total sample, n = 1236. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Less than half of the community respondents (44 per cent) identified a *government employee using a work credit card to pay for a personal taxi fare of \$50* as corrupt conduct. In comparison, a majority of Victoria Police, state government and local government respondents correctly stated that this scenario definitely involved corrupt conduct.⁶

Less than half of the community respondents (45 per cent) also identified a *government employee having an exclusive contract with a company owned by a family member of a senior department member* as corrupt conduct. However, opinions varied across the four respondent groups in relation to this scenario, with 34 per cent of Victoria Police, 60 per cent of state government and 53 per cent of local government respondents identifying this scenario as corrupt conduct.

The scenario of a *local council hosting an extravagant Christmas party for employees* prompted the greatest spread of responses with only 13 per cent of community respondents identifying this as definitely corrupt and 26 per cent stating that it was probably corrupt, consistent with other respondent groups.⁷

These results are also consistent with the findings of IBAC's 2015 research in which two of the clearest instances of corruption identified by community respondents involved *state or local government employees accepting bribes*.⁸

Community members surveyed were also asked to identify whether a series of police-specific scenarios involved corruption or misconduct. The majority of community respondents (78 per cent) stated that a *police officer accepting bribes to avoid investigating illegal activity* is definitely corrupt, as shown in Figure 2 on the next page. The majority (73 per cent) also stated that a *police officer removing drugs from a crime scene and keeping the drugs for personal use* is definitely corrupt. Similarly, the vast majority of Victoria Police respondents stated that the same two scenarios definitely involved corrupt conduct.⁹

Two behaviours were correctly identified as 'not corrupt but misconduct' by the majority of community respondents, namely a *police officer using racial slurs against a suspect* (58 per cent), and a *police officer repeatedly asking a victim out on a date* (60 per cent). These were also the top two scenarios identified by Victoria Police respondents as misconduct. However, a larger proportion of Victoria Police respondents stated that these scenarios involved misconduct as opposed to corruption, suggesting greater clarity among police in relation to identifying misconduct.¹⁰

A further two behaviours were identified as misconduct by a third of community respondents, namely a *police officer having friendships with people involved in illegal activities* (33 per cent) and a *police officer accepting free food from a fast food outlet* (34 per cent). While a larger proportion of Victoria Police respondents (50 per cent) identified a *police officer having friendships with people involved in illegal activities* as misconduct, a smaller proportion (24 per cent) identified a *police officer accepting free food from a fast food outlet* as misconduct.

⁶ Sixty-five per cent of Victoria Police, 73 per cent of state government and 74 per cent of local government respondents stated that a state, local or Victoria Police *employee using a work credit card to pay for a personal taxi fare of \$50* 'definitely is corrupt'.

⁷ Eight per cent of Victoria Police, 18 per cent of state government and 12 per cent of local government respondents stated that a local council or a Victoria Police unit *hosting an extravagant party for employees* 'definitely is corrupt'.

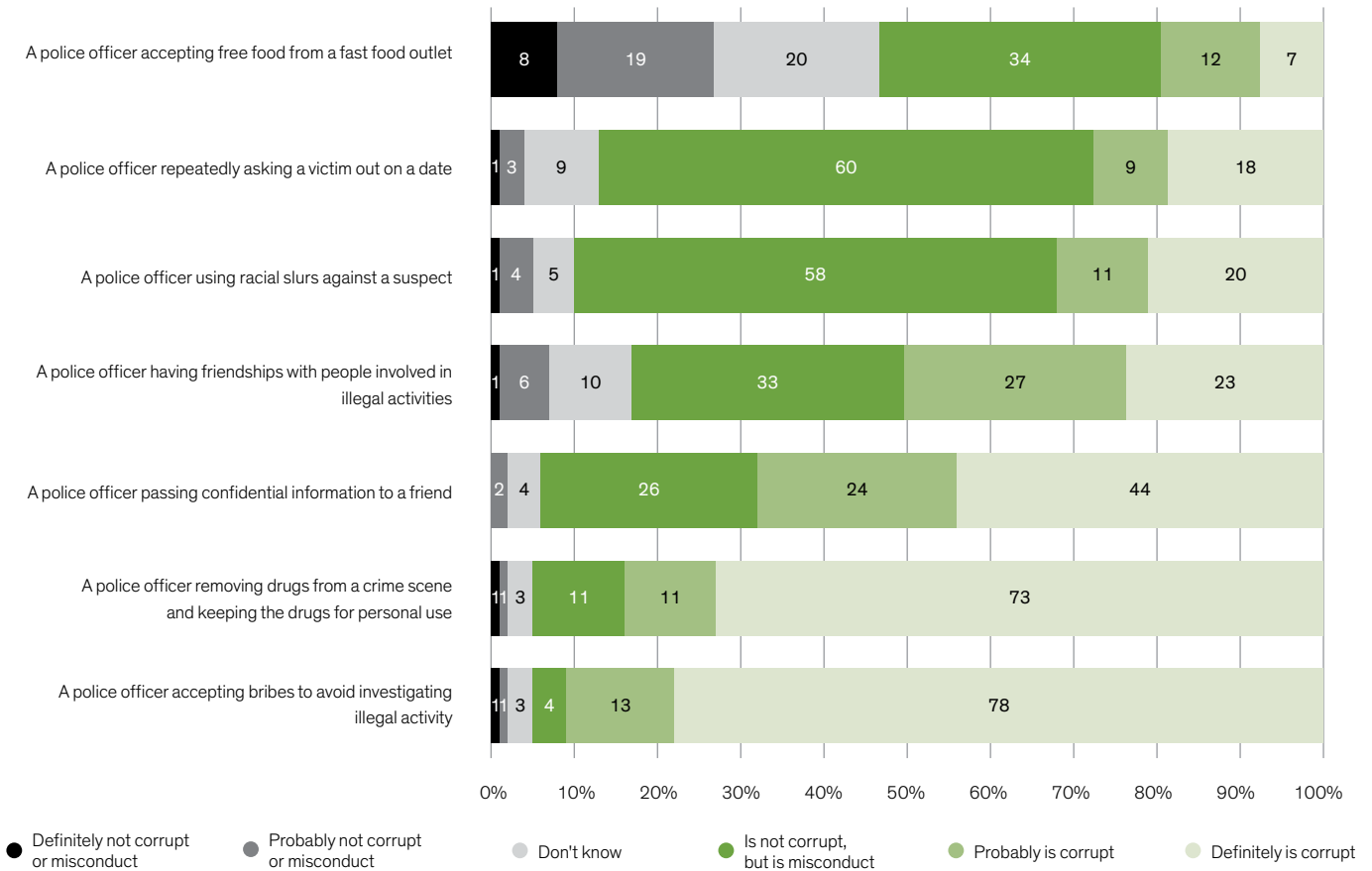
⁸ In the 2015 study, 76 per cent of Victorian community respondents identified a state or local government *employee accepting a bribe in order to award a contract to a supplier* as definitely corrupt and 71 per cent of respondents identified a state or government employee receiving a 'kickback' (ie bribe) from a contractor as definitely corrupt.

⁹ Ninety-eight per cent of Victoria Police respondents stated that a *police officer accepting bribes to avoid investigating illegal activity* 'definitely is corrupt' and 89 per cent of Victoria Police respondents stated that a *police officer removing drugs from a crime scene and keeping the drugs for personal use* 'definitely is corrupt'.

¹⁰ Seventy-eight per cent of Victoria Police respondents stated that a *police officer using racial slurs against a suspect* 'is not corrupt, but is misconduct' and 74 per cent of Victoria Police respondents stated that a *police officer repeatedly asking a victim out on a date* 'is not corrupt, but is misconduct'.

3 Perceptions of corruption

FIGURE 2: DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN CORRUPTION AND MISCONDUCT



Base: Total sample, n = 1236. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

These results are broadly consistent with the findings of IBAC’s 2015 research in which scenarios involving bribes or the removal of drugs from a crime scene for personal gain were correctly identified as corrupt conduct by the majority of respondents, while scenarios involving inappropriate interactions with suspects and victims (such as the use of racial slurs and repeated requests for a date) were identified as misconduct rather than corruption by the majority of respondents.¹¹

¹¹ In the 2015 study, 83 per cent of community respondents stated that *accepting bribes to avoid investigating illegal activity* is corrupt, 76 per cent stated that *removing drugs from a crime scene and selling the drugs* is corrupt, and 61 per cent stated that *removing drugs from a crime scene and keeping the drugs for personal use* is corrupt. In addition, 69 per cent of community respondents stated that *using racial slurs against a suspect* is not corruption but is misconduct and 57 per cent stated that *repeatedly asking a victim out on a date* is not corruption but is misconduct.

4 Attitudes to reporting and preventing corruption and misconduct

Understanding attitudes towards reporting corruption, and whether people know how to report, helps IBAC and other agencies to identify and overcome any barriers – real or perceived – to reporting.

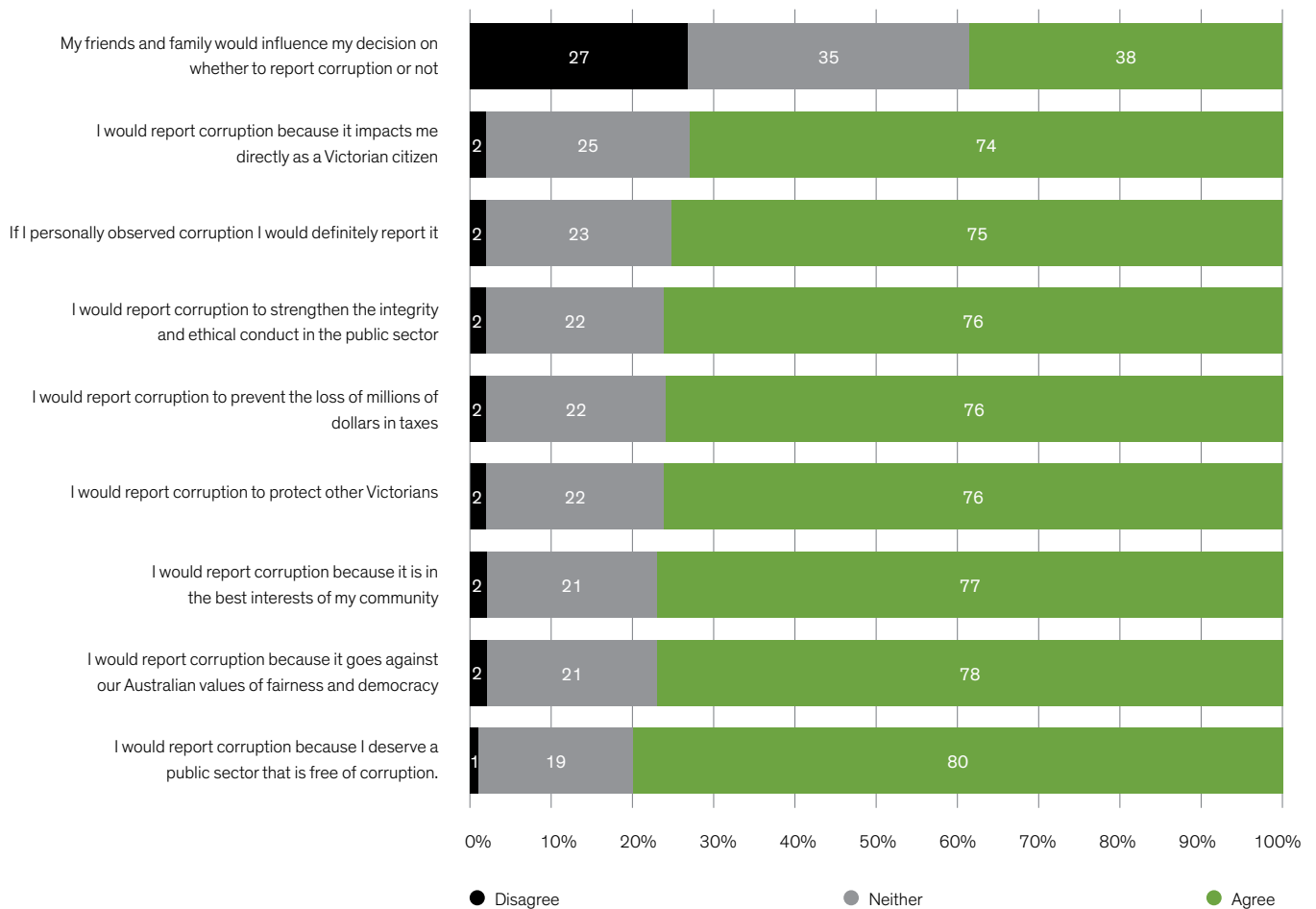
Community members were asked what would drive them to report corruption, whether they knew how to report corruption and where to report it, and their views on protection for those who report corruption.

4.1 Drivers for reporting corruption

The majority of community respondents identified eight factors that would influence them to report corruption, as shown in Figure 3 below. While there was little variation between the eight factors considered to be relevant, the largest proportion stated that they would report corruption because they *deserve a public sector that is free of corruption* (80 per cent).

A slightly smaller proportion of respondents were driven by *values of fairness and democracy* (78 per cent) and the *best interests of my community* (77 per cent).

FIGURE 3: DRIVERS FOR REPORTING CORRUPTION



Base: Total sample, n = 1236. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Community respondents were more equivocal as to whether *my friends and family would influence my decision on whether to report corruption or not*. Only 38 per cent agreed with this statement, and 27 per cent disagreed.

Consistent with Victoria Police, state government and local government respondents, 75 per cent of community respondents stated that they would report corruption if they *personally observed it*.¹²

'I probably haven't come across any [corruption]. But if I did report — it depends on what it was and what was involved. If there was another way to solve it other than reporting [I would look for it].'

Respondent

These results are also consistent with IBAC's 2015 research findings in which 78 per cent of community respondents agreed (with varying levels of certainty) that if they encountered a state government public servant acting in a corrupt manner, they would report it.

4.2 Reporting corruption

The willingness of community members to report suspected corruption is affected by their understanding of what corruption is and how to report it, as well as social and moral drivers.

Knowing how to report corruption was low among community respondents. Only a quarter of community respondents agreed they confidently knew *how to report corruption* (23 per cent) or *where to report corruption* (24 per cent). Over a third of community respondents disagreed with the statement *I know how to report corruption* (36 per cent) and *I know where to report corruption* (37 per cent).

'Wouldn't know where to start — who to talk to.'

Respondent

'Who do you report it to and maybe that person could be corrupt too.'

Respondent

'Most of the time I would not know what corruption [is] and I don't know who to report it to.'

Respondent

¹² Eighty per cent of Victoria Police, 72 per cent of state government and 75 per cent of local government respondents agreed that they would definitely report corruption if they personally observed it.

When asked where they would report corruption, respondents were most likely to report serious corruption to IBAC (39 per cent), the Victorian Ombudsman (21 per cent) and Victoria Police (15 per cent), as shown in Figure 4.

In IBAC's 2013 research, 51 per cent of Victorian community respondents said they knew where to report corruption. Of those who said they knew where to report, 55 per cent stated they would report corruption to Victoria Police and 19 per cent stated they would report to the Victorian Ombudsman. Although it is not known why a lower proportion of community respondents indicated they know where to report corruption in 2016, it is possible that a lower level of certainty may be due to people having more options about where to report.¹³

These results highlight a significant issue and opportunity to raise awareness. While three-quarters of community respondents said they would report corruption if they personally observed it, less than a quarter of respondents are confident that they know how or where to report.

In comparison, Victoria Police, state government and local government respondents were more confident that they know how to report corruption (64 per cent, 33 per cent and 41 per cent respectively). This is not surprising given public sector agencies have an important role to communicate and educate their employees about reporting corruption.

FIGURE 4 : WHO WOULD YOU REPORT SERIOUS CORRUPTION TO?

	Total (%)
IBAC	39
Victorian Ombudsman	21
Victoria Police	15
Someone at the organisation that employs the person acting corruptly	8
Victorian Public Sector Commission	7
A friend or family member	5
I would not report corruption	3
Other	2

Base: Total sample, n = 1236.

¹³ The survey component of the 2013 research was conducted via a telephone poll in 2012 before IBAC was fully established.

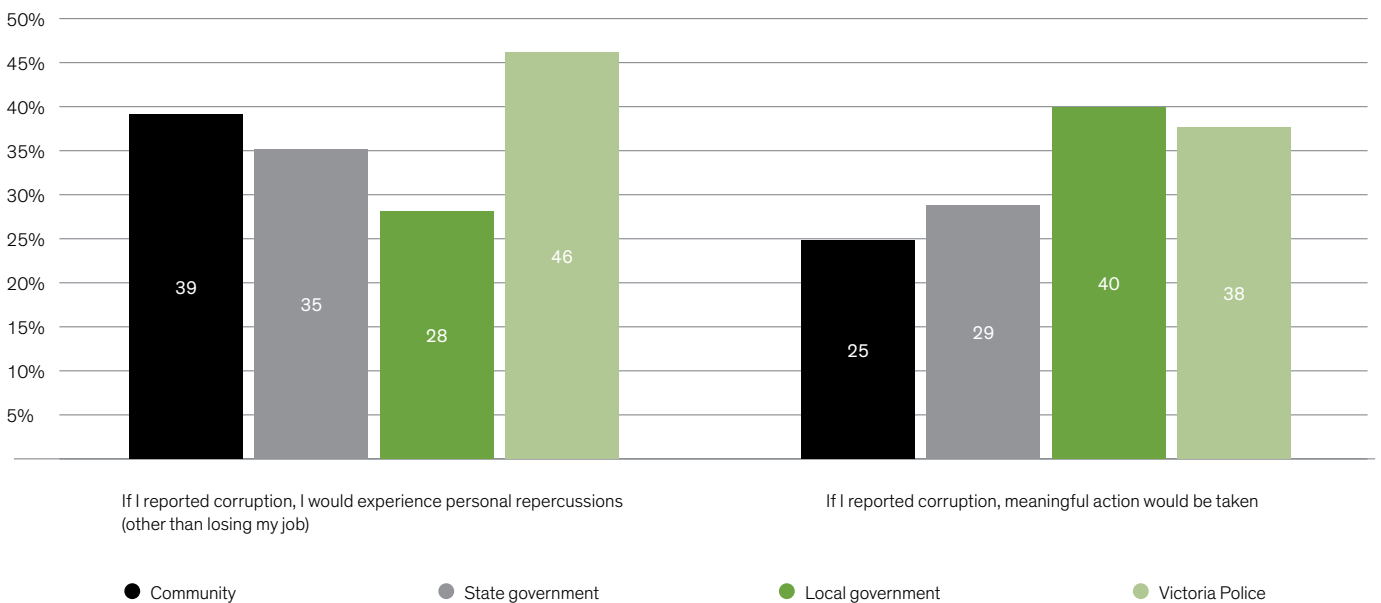
4 Attitudes to reporting and preventing corruption and misconduct

Three per cent of community respondents said they would not report corruption. In comparison, only one per cent of Victoria Police, state government and local government respondents said they would not report. The most common reasons community respondents gave for not reporting was a *need to have evidence to back up the allegation* (45 per cent), followed by concern that *a report could affect me personally* (22 per cent).

These findings are broadly consistent with IBAC’s 2015 research, where community members cited fear of personal consequences, a concern that nothing would be done or simply that they would not be believed, as reasons for not reporting corruption.

In 2017, IBAC launched a community education campaign, *When something’s not right. Report it*, to improve understanding of public sector corruption and how to prevent and report suspected corrupt conduct. IBAC is continuing its work to further raise awareness of public sector corruption and how to report it.

FIGURE 5: PROTECTING THOSE WHO REPORT – COMPARING RESPONDENT GROUPS



Base: Total sample, n = 4542 (state government), n = 1019 (local government), n = 1172 (Victoria Police), n = 1236 (Victorian community)

4.3 Perceptions of protections and the impacts of reporting

A substantial proportion of community respondents indicated that they felt there were personal costs involved in reporting corruption. Compared to state government and local government respondents (35 per cent and 28 per cent respectively), a slightly larger proportion of community respondents (39 per cent) anticipated personal repercussions if they reported corruption. And a larger proportion of Victoria Police respondents anticipated personal repercussions (46 per cent), as shown in Figure 5.

Only a quarter of community respondents felt that *meaningful action would be taken* if they reported corruption (25 per cent). This was a lower proportion than the other respondent groups.¹⁴

'What's the point? Nothing would get done about it, and so to report, when that person will probably get a slap on the wrist, if anything at all, is a waste of time.'

Respondent

Concern around the level of protection available to people reporting corruption was also an issue for community respondents, with 30 per cent disagreeing with the statement *if I reported corruption, I am confident I would be protected from victimisation*. These issues can create barriers to reporting, as shown in Figure 6.

'I am not confident that reprisals would not occur against me or my family.'

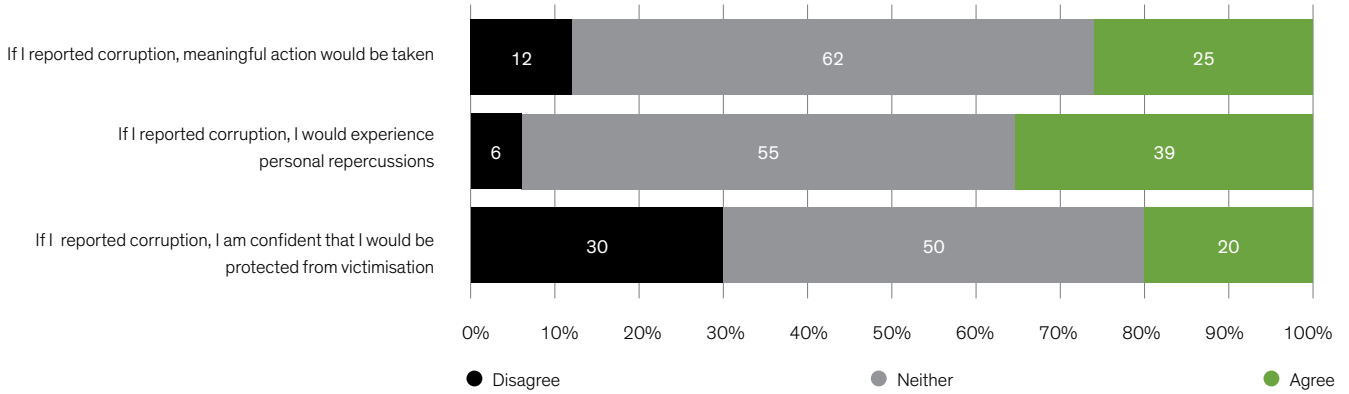
Respondent

'I worry that people committing corrupt acts will put me or my family in harm's way.'

Respondent

¹⁴ Thirty-eight per cent of Victoria Police, 29 per cent of state government and 40 per cent of local government respondents agreed that *meaningful action would be taken if they reported corruption*.

FIGURE 6: PROTECTING THOSE WHO REPORT



Base: Total sample, n = 1236. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

As with other respondent groups, the large number of community respondents in the ‘neither agree nor disagree’ range for all three questions in Figure 6 suggest a high level of uncertainty around these issues, which could influence an individual’s decision to report.

While there is clearly scope to increase community confidence in reporting corruption, these figures are an improvement on the findings from the 2015 research. This research found that just under 59 per cent of community respondents felt that they would be *victimised or harassed by people associated with the organisation that I reported*.

4.4 Community attitudes to preventing corruption

The research looked at community attitudes to preventing corruption. Community opinion was divided regarding the public's role in preventing corruption. Fifty-six per cent agreed with the statement *I have a responsibility to prevent corruption*. The variety of views on individual responsibility for corruption prevention was reflected in comments from respondents.

'I am not in a position of power to prevent anything, let alone corruption!'

Respondent

'It's not my role as I do not work in the public sector.'

Respondent

'We all have a responsibility to protect each other. Also, I follow the old saying that: "Evil flourishes when good people do nothing".'

Respondent

Respondents were largely unsure what they could do to prevent corruption, with only 19 per cent agreeing that they were confident they knew how to prevent corruption. However, comments suggest that some community respondents are aware that they can play a role in preventing corruption by acting with integrity and reporting suspected corruption.

'I don't know how to prevent other people being corrupt, I would not be corrupt myself and I would try to prevent corruption continuing if I knew about it, by reporting it.'

Respondent

'Unsure how to prevent corruption except to always be ethical myself and lead by example within my group/organisation.'

Respondent

5 Conclusion

Community respondents were reasonably well informed about corruption and demonstrated a strong willingness to report corruption. However, less than a quarter of community respondents agreed they confidently knew how or where to report corruption. This represents an opportunity to increase awareness in the community on how to report corruption.

5.1 Understanding and recognising corruption

Compared with other respondents (state government, local government and Victoria Police), community members were less confident they knew what constituted corrupt behaviour, but two-thirds believed corruption is a problem for Victoria.

Receiving financial rewards and bribes were the two behaviours most people identified as corrupt conduct. This is consistent with other surveyed groups. Responsible and honest use of public funds to deliver public sector services is a clear expectation of the Victorian community, and behaviours that jeopardise the use of public money were generally identified as corruption by this respondent group.

5.2 Drivers and barriers for reporting

A high level of agreement on the social and moral drivers to reporting corruption suggest a willingness in the community to report corruption. This willingness is based on personal values, expectations that public money should be managed responsibly, and a sense that public sector services should be delivered professionally and fairly.

Three-quarters of respondents showed a willingness to report corruption if they personally observed it, consistent with state government, local government and Victoria Police respondents. This suggests a willingness to report is likely to be founded on personal values.

Barriers to reporting, caused either by a lack of awareness of the process or concern about potential personal costs, can have a direct impact on the willingness of people to report corruption.

Less than a quarter of the community respondents were confident they knew how and where to report corruption. These results were lower than those observed for the other respondent groups. This is not surprising given the other groups as public sector employees should have organisational resources to draw on when thinking about the reporting process.

Community members had low levels of confidence that their reports would be acted upon and meaningful action would be taken. Eighty per cent of respondents did not agree that they were confident they would be protected from victimisation if they reported corruption.

Together, these results suggest there is a strong willingness to report if community members better understand how to report and feel confident they will not be victimised. This highlights the importance of a protected disclosure regime that provides public sector workers and the community with the confidence to speak out and report corruption and misconduct, knowing they will be protected.

IBAC has an important role to inform the Victorian public sector and community about the detrimental effects of corruption and the ways in which it can be prevented. The findings from this research will inform the development of IBAC's future prevention, engagement and awareness raising.

