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# Combating Corruption

*People in positions of power should not lightly violate or discard long-standing political norms, especially norms that serve to limit the abuse of power (1a; see D&C 121:39).*

*Government officials and institutions should be honest and transparent, insofar as possible without harming national security and individual rights (1b; see D&C 123:13 and Alma 37:25).*

*Elected and appointed officials and government employees alike must eschew conflicts of interest and avoid the appearance of a conflict of interest in fidelity to the public trust. Appointees to specialized government roles should be well-qualified to serve in those roles (1c; see Mosiah 29:35-36 and D&C 134:3).*

## GOALS

1. Learn to identify corruption and understand its effects.
2. Decide what ethical expectations you have for your elected officials and commit to speak up or vote against those who don't measure up.

**SCRIPTURE STUDY**

*"And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant." — Matthew 20:27*

As citizens, we agree to delegate considerable power to our government leaders to create and maintain a system of government that protects our rights. This agreement requires that all of us, both citizens and leaders, follow the rule of law that results. As such, we can and should demand that officials use their power only for the good of the people they represent by working within the law and existing norms. This includes acting honestly and transparently and avoiding conflicts of interest (for example, making political appointments according to qualification instead of favoritism or political gain).

Abuse of government power for personal gain is called corruption. Corrupt officials make decisions (like where to spend money, which laws to enact, and who enforces or interprets the law) based on how it will help them personally rather than how it will help people overall. This undermines the agreement that the officials will use power for the good of the people, causing citizen distrust and a loss of government credibility and legitimacy. Distrust leads to a feeling of powerlessness, resulting in a disengaged, apathetic citizenry that fails to hold its government leaders accountable.

We have to be able to identify both corruption and the proper use of government power, and be willing to use our voice and our vote to support those who would use entrusted power for the good of the people and to decry corruption.

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# HOW DO WE FIGHT CORRUPTION?

In the United States we have options for fighting corruption, but they must be used and protected. These include the independence and power of federal law enforcement from political interference; a free press; and enacting and enforcing laws that require transparency of government officials in both their finances and official duties, as well as laws against nepotism, favoritism, and office selling. The U.S. Constitution provides that impeachment is available to Congress as a check against corruption for "the President, the Vice president, and all civil officers of the United States." Above all, we have the power to vote for ethical candidates and vote out corrupt government officials.

## THE COST OF CORRUPTION

*Content adapted from "The Rationale for Fighting Corruption" (OECD 2013), excerpted in Ferguson, Gerry A. Global Corruption: Law, Theory & Practice: Legal Regulation of Global Corruption under International Conventions, US, UK and Canadian Law. University of Victoria, 2018, pgs. 8-11.*

### CORRUPTION WEAKENS OUR SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT

- *Checks and balances stop working when leaders disregard the rule of law and seek to silence their critics, including the media.*
- *The people lose their power when elections or other political processes become corrupted.*
- *Government loses its purpose when it can't be trusted to protect rights, including providing basic services, to its people.*

### CORRUPTION IS WASTEFUL

- *A government employee hired or appointed for personal gain is less likely to be qualified for the position, compromising performance and effective governance.*
- *Corrupt officials can channel public funds to projects that benefit them personally (like a power plant or pipeline) instead of to higher-need projects that would benefit society (like hospitals, schools, or roads).*
- *Embezzled money is never applied to public needs.*

### CORRUPTION PROMOTES INEQUALITY

- *Corruption favors those with money and assets, causing the poor to become poorer.*
- *As corruption makes it harder and more costly to access basic services like health care or education, the poor are the first to face barriers or lose access completely.*

### CORRUPTION IS EXPENSIVE

- *Corruption adds the cost of bribery to business transactions as well as increases risk and uncertainty.*
- *People are more reluctant to invest because they can't predict the way the fair market will function, partly because competition is distorted.*

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# CORRUPTION IN REAL LIFE

Historic U.S. corruption: Time Magazine asked seven historians to each name the worst political scandal in U.S. history.

International corruption: Transparency International tells true stories of corruption around the world and how people are fighting back.

## GOVERNMENT RESOURCES

The U.S. Office of Government Ethics runs the ethics program designed to prevent and resolve conflicts of interest for the executive branch, including presidential appointees.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) is the law that keeps citizens in the know about their government. Anyone can make a FOIA request.

## FIGHTING CORRUPTION

Transparency International hosts the Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks 180 countries and territories according to their perceived levels of public sector corruption. Take a look to see which country is number one and how the U.S. compares.

World Justice Project, an organization committed to advancing the rule of law, developed four universal principles of the rule of law and the WJP Rule of Law Index, which annually reports how the rule of law is experienced worldwide.

OpenSecrets is a nonpartisan nonprofit that provides data, analysis, and tools to help Americans understand money in U.S. politics and its effect on elections and public policy.

***What do you think?***

- *How have government leaders breached citizen trust by making policy decisions for personal gain?*
- *Is abuse of power ever justified by the good it accomplishes? Why or why not?*
- *Why is it easier to go along with a crowd or a leader instead of standing up for what we believe? How can we better recognize when and how to push back?*
- *Why is transparency in government important? What circumstances make it more or less so?*