ZEFFER / RESEARCH

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Corruption in America

The cost to everyday life

U.S. CORRUPTION INDEX[1]

64 / 100

Down from 76 in 2015

Higher score = cleaner public sector

U.S. GLOBAL POSITION[1]

29th

of 182 countries and territories

Transparency International • CPI 2025

AMERICANS' PERCEPTIONS[2]

89%

say government corruption is widespread

79% in 2025 → 89% in 2026

Cleaner government. Happier lives?

Five highest-scoring CPI countries + the U.S. • 2025 report editions[1 3]

COUNTRY	CPI SCORE	CPI RANK	HAPPINESS RANK
Denmark	89	1	2
Finland	88	2	1
Singapore	84	3	34
New Zealand	81	=4	12
Norway	81	=4	7
United States	**64**	**=29**	**24**

CPI: 0–100; bars start at zero. Rank 1 is best in each index. "=" denotes a tie.

Four of the five CPI leaders rank above the U.S. on happiness.

Singapore is the exception. These comparisons do not establish causation.

Why it matters to daily life[4]

01 PUBLIC SERVICES

Corruption can make healthcare, education and justice more costly and harder to access.

02 FAIR OPPORTUNITY

Favoritism can divert public contracts toward connected firms and weaken competition.

03 TRUST & INEQUALITY

Corruption erodes confidence in government and burdens vulnerable people most.

Global evidence • World Bank

THE 2026 MIDTERMS: ETHICS MOVED TO THE FOREGROUND[5]

31% of general-election TV ads analyzed mentioned ethics or campaign finance — the highest share in the series dating to 2012.

Brennan Center / Wesleyan Media Project • October 30, 2026 • Measures campaign emphasis, not why voters voted.

Accountability protects public money, fair opportunity and trust.

SOURCES & DEFINITIONS

1 Transparency International, CPI 2025 and CPI 2015 • transparency.org/en/cpi/2025
2 Gallup, Sept. 2, 2026 • 3 World Happiness Report 2025, Ch. 2 (life evaluations averaged over 2022–24)
4 World Bank, Combating Corruption • 5 Brennan Center / Wesleyan, Ads Focusing on Corruption Surge in Midterms
CPI captures expert/business assessments of public-sector corruption; Gallup captures public perceptions. Neither counts proven offenses.