

WHAT MAKES NEW ZEALAND, DENMARK, FINLAND, SWEDEN AND OTHERS “CLEANER” THAN MOST COUNTRIES?

by [Marie Chêne](#) on 7 December 2011 in [Measurement and Research](#)

Marie Chêne, Senior Research Coordinator at Transparency International, looks at the countries that are ranked highest in the [2011 Corruption Perceptions Index](#).

New Zealand, Denmark, [Finland](#) and Sweden have been consistently ranked at the top of the Corruption Perceptions Index and are perceived to be the least corrupt of all the countries surveyed.

They are not perfect – still falling short of the target 10 out of 10 on the index – but many still want to know about how these countries have managed to contain corruption.



Beside law enforcement, there is a broad consensus that fighting corruption involves public participation and transparency mechanisms such as disclosure of information.

Preliminary findings from upcoming [country studies](#) for [Finland](#), Denmark and Sweden indicate that this “integrity system” function relatively well in these countries.

But what makes their “[national integrity systems](#)” more effective?

Beside a strong commitment to anti-corruption by political leaders, Finland, Sweden, Denmark and to a certain extent New

Zealand all share a common set of characteristics that are typically correlated with lower levels of corruption.

[Recent studies](#) show that freedom of the press is positively correlated with control of corruption in well established democracies. Finland, Denmark, Sweden and New Zealand all have high GDP per capita, low inequality rates, literacy rates close to 100 %, and prioritise human right issues (e.g. gender equality, freedom of information).

Crucially, they all perform well in terms of government openness and effectiveness.

Read about the **Corruption Perceptions Index 2011** [here](#).

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For a blog post defining public sector corruption click [here](#) and to read about our CPI Iphone App see [here](#).

For more on corruption in Europe, see [here](#) and [here](#)

This does not fully explain the good performance in fighting corruption. A hundred years ago, before their transition to good governance, [Denmark](#) and [Sweden](#) were not the darlings of the anti-corruption world. For example, the Swedish principle of public access to official documents is one of the oldest

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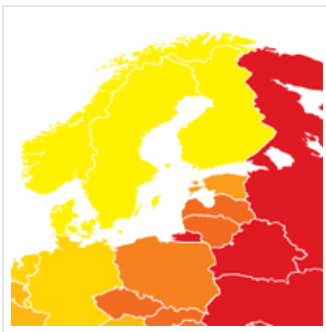
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Well performing countries typically have a long tradition of government openness, civic activism and social trust, with strong transparency and accountability mechanism in place allowing citizens to monitor their politicians and hold them accountable for their actions and decisions.



- disclosure of budget information closes the door to waste and misappropriation of public funds. Therefore, countries should seek to promote information disclosure as well as enhance citizens' participation throughout the budget process. The [Open Budget Index](#) shows that Sweden allows citizens to assess how their government is managing public funds.
- [Codes of conduct](#) for public servants. Denmark obliges ministers to monthly publish information on their spending travel and gifts
- Legal framework criminalising a wide range of corruption related abuses and an independent and efficient judiciary.



It is important to point out that these countries still face challenges e.g. protective legislation for **whistleblowers**, corruption risk in **public procurement**, effective political (**party**) finance regulation etc.

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A 457 personas les gusta esto. Sé el primero de tus amigos.





Marie Chêne is Senior Research Coordinator at Transparency International.
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Adam 7 December 2011 at 7:57 pm #

Hi, just a couple of points:

- NZ is one of the least equal societies in the OECD.

- And recent events have tarnished the freedom of the press – for example, the Prime Minister took action during the election campaign that led to search warrants being executed against several media organisations. This is an example of a trend of interference with the media.

I believe corruption is a deeply cultural matter, so I hope NZ isn't on a path to damage it's excellent standing.



Roger 8 December 2011 at 11:56 am #

Vishal Mangalwadi explores what it is about western civilisation that makes it more corruption proof than other cultures.



Agustin Mackinlay 14 December 2011 at 11:26 am #

Excellent work! By the way, and index of “checks & balances” –with judicial independence and freedom of the press as key variables– shows a very strong correlation with the PCI.

<http://frenosycontrapesos.blogspot.com/2011/11/1-nueva-zelanda-8.html>

Cheers,

Agustin



Kiwi 19 January 2012 at 9:13 am #

Adam, the media in question that John Key issued search warrants against had recorded private conversations of his, while I do not support his political party at all I do not blame him for taking this step against intrusive media who violated his privacy



Delia Matilde FERREIRA RUBIO 20 January 2012 at 9:47 pm #

Excellent synthesis. Best of all is that the road can be followed by others.



Luis Felipe Martí Iturbide 30 January 2012 at 6:18 pm #

Could you send information in spanish?

Olateju Michael Amodu 30 January 2012 at 10:47 pm #



Crucial anyway is first of all give kudos to the government of these countries that are doing pretty well, so they can be anyway encouraged to do even better. And use the synthesis to unarguably challenge Nigeria government first, my country and other country of the world that fell on the indictment level to wake up from their slumber and evil ways of running public office funds. My earnest prayer is that happens in my generation.

Thanks guys.



Don Miller 2 May 2012 at 11:31 pm #

Recent events involving New Zealand's politicians, particularly the ACT Party leader and cabinet minister, makes a mockery of this nation being called almost corruption free. One can also look at issues surrounding transport policy and the irrational decisions on government spending that unwisely favour high energy consuming heavy road transport over rail. And the trade-offs over gaming machines, convention centres and election "donations". Like a tall mountain sheathed in cloud – its getting very murky at the top.



Gary G Stromberger 7 May 2012 at 10:30 pm #

Why is transparency measured on a Nationalistic level not a Global level?

As Global compliance ranking becomes the result of a virtual crown, why does legal transparency out rank lawful transparency (ethics, reign is all around but not where I am standing)?



VITHAL 21 May 2012 at 3:12 am #

I am a kid , but my dream is to stop corruption when I become big so I am researching about corruption so that my own country would be beautiful like other countries..... 😊



Swedish companies 30 May 2012 at 10:34 am #

Swedish companies are in general very productive and environmentally conscious



Validate 25 June 2012 at 5:04 am #

I think this list is corrupt information by itself. I am from Sweden and the corruption here is vast and on a dramatic increase, a fact which I do not feel is in concordance with your list. However I do also believe it is well-hidden. I simply think Sweden has at least equal amount of corruption to other countries in Europe, but it might be more well concealed.



mike penney 4 August 2012 at 11:08 pm #

It's too bad about the United States.... They are so impressed with themselves and yet are becoming more corrupt by the minute.

Blame corporate control of government officials, lobbyists, campaign financing, supreme court , and media.... with growing interference in the school system.



Kevin 6 September 2012 at 3:12 pm #

Draft without malice. One could in all fairness ask is perception the reality? I think not. I have seen too much corruption to believe otherwise may I say in goodwill? Rather than publishing a perception index, why not ask if the officials even take reports about crimes, like bribery and fraud, theft and threats, extortion or do the authorities in some western countries all too often point their fingers at others while shoving victims off the desk who may attempt to come forward? Maybe TI International could invite some victims to come forward, who can document corruption in the west and how it works? That might do more than false beliefs, false perceptions? How lacking in human rights the system can be at times!



Filmari Nunti 24 January 2013 at 11:45 am #

interesting article, should be done more like this, keep up the good work.

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[...] among the "most clean" when it comes to public sector corruption. As discussed in a previous post, such good results stem from political will, open government and robust legislation and mechanisms [...]"

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I would say the Scandinavian countries : Norway, Sweden, Denmark. They are among the least corrupt countries in the world (with one of the highest per capita GDP ,highest percentage of non religious population, and among the top happiest countries in t...

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