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Community attitudes to corruption and the ICAC: Report on the 2006 survey

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This publication provides readers with advice, guidance and/or recommendations regarding specific governance issues.

The advice contained herein relates to what the ICAC considers at the time of publication to be best practice in relation to these issues. It does not constitute legal advice, and failure to implement the advice, guidance and recommendations contained herein does not constitute corrupt conduct, which is defined in the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*.

Public sector organisations are welcome to refer to this publication in their own publications. References to and all quotations from this publication must be fully referenced.

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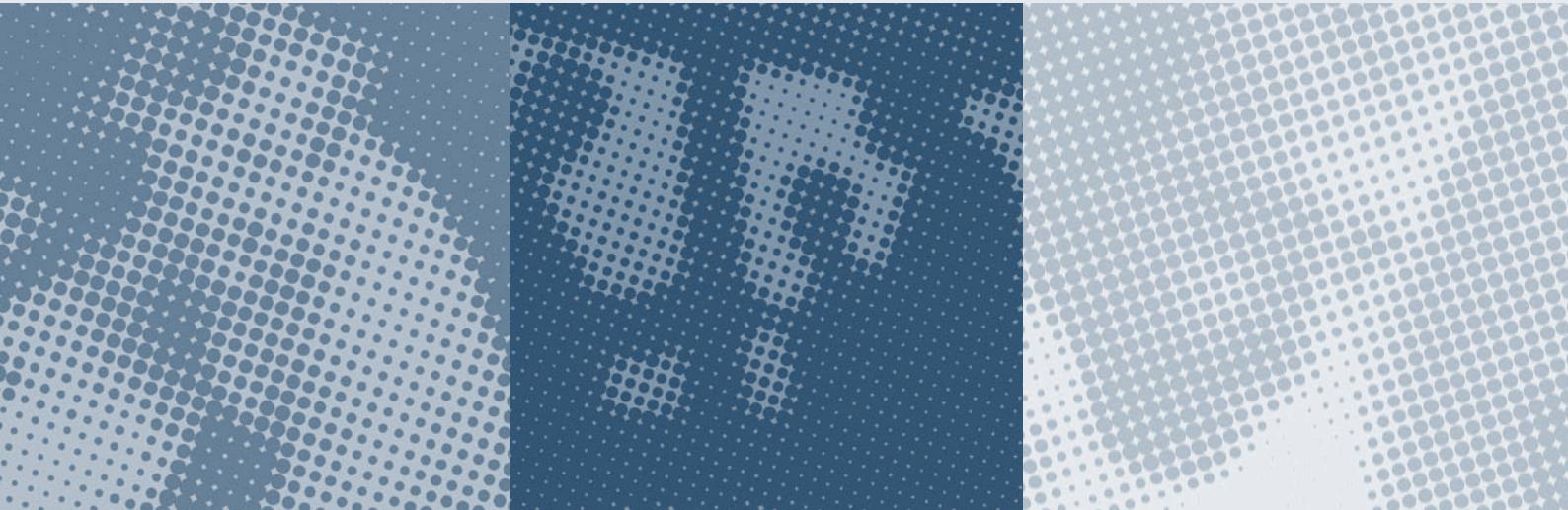
Executive summary

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was established to expose and prevent corruption in the NSW public sector. The ICAC has three principal functions: investigation of allegations of corrupt conduct, corruption prevention and education. To assist in informing and monitoring the impact of corruption prevention and education activities, the ICAC has periodically conducted community attitude surveys of NSW residents to gauge their views and knowledge regarding corruption and the ICAC.

This report provides detailed findings from the seventh community attitude survey which was administered to 502 NSW residents during May and June 2006. Some new questions were included to examine issues not addressed by previous surveys, the latest of which was conducted in 2003. While findings were generally consistent with results observed previously, there were also some differences from previous surveys.

Perceptions of corruption

Participants were asked to define corruption, and just over half defined it as involving some form of personal and usually financial gain. Examples given by participants included accepting money, gratuities or bribes and "lining their own pocket". About a quarter of the participants suggested that corruption involves something illegal, dishonest or wrong.

As with previous surveys, participants were asked to rate how serious a problem they perceived public sector corruption to be in NSW. Although relatively stable in surveys conducted prior to 1999, in surveys conducted since 1999 the proportion of participants who indicated that they thought corruption is a problem has fallen. Indeed the lowest rate, 72 per cent of the sample, was recorded in the current survey. Participants were also asked to indicate the extent to which they felt corruption was a problem in government departments and in local councils. A greater proportion of participants felt corruption was a problem for local councils than the rate for the public sector overall.

The 2006 survey also recorded the lowest percentage of people who felt they were affected by corruption in some way. Of those who felt it did affect them, the most

commonly reported ways were in the sense that corruption affected everyone (e.g. the taxpayers or the whole community).

Overall, 19 per cent of participants claimed to have personally witnessed corrupt behaviour in the NSW public sector. Approximately twice as many indicated that they had heard about such activities from people they knew.

For the first time participants were asked to indicate if they believed each of a list of nominated activities commonly occurred within the NSW public sector. The three activities which were thought to be common by the largest number of participants were favouritism, misuse of public resources and failure to disclose a conflict of interest.

In another new section of the survey, participants were asked to indicate which, if any, of a list of activities they felt might constitute corruption. While there was general agreement regarding whether or not some activities involved corrupt behaviour, views were divided about whether or not it was wrong to use work time and resources for some specified activities, e.g. photocopying weekly flyers for children's sporting teams at work.[1]

Attitudes to reporting corruption

Ninety-two per cent of the participants felt that "it is okay to report corruption in the NSW public sector". However, 68 per cent felt that those who report corruption are likely to suffer for it. Only one-third of the sample believed they knew where to report corruption.

Most people believed that it was their responsibility to report corruption. Just under 50 per cent agreed with the statement that if they reported corruption something useful would be done about it.

Over 80 per cent of the participants indicated that they were likely or very likely to report serious corruption. This, however, dropped to 42 per cent for less serious corruption. The Police and the Ombudsman were the two agencies most commonly nominated as agencies to which corruption might be reported.

Awareness and perceptions of the ICAC

A series of questions were asked regarding participants' knowledge of the ICAC, its functions and effectiveness. Of the 82 per cent of the sample who were aware of the ICAC, 93 per cent indicated that they thought having the agency was a good thing for the people of NSW. This value has remained stable since the earliest community attitude surveys conducted for the ICAC. In the 2006 survey, almost three-quarters of the participants who were aware of the ICAC felt it was successful in exposing corruption, but only just over half felt it was successful in reducing corruption. These values were similar to those observed in 2003.

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1. The various scenarios used in this survey were developed to gain a better understanding of community perceptions of what they believe "corruption" is. The scenarios should not be interpreted as conduct that would necessarily constitute corrupt conduct as defined in sections 8 and 9 of the *Independent Commission Against Corruption Act 1988*.

Participants were asked what they thought was included in ICAC's functions and jurisdiction by indicating whether or not they believe a number of statements to be true. Generally the findings were similar to previous surveys. Some of the functions and jurisdiction of the ICAC were understood by a large proportion of the sample. For example, most reported that they believed the ICAC is independent of the government of the day and that it can investigate allegations of corruption in local councils or against politicians. However, other aspects of the ICAC's jurisdiction were less well understood by the participants.

A large proportion of the participants, and particularly those in younger age groups, indicated that they would utilise the internet to find out more about the ICAC if they needed to. Eighty participants indicated that they had read some of the ICAC's materials.

Overall, the survey indicated that community attitudes towards corruption and the ICAC have remained relatively stable in terms of perceptions of corruption, attitudes towards reporting corruption and awareness and perceptions of the ICAC.

Introduction

The Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) was established to expose and prevent corruption in the NSW public sector. The ICAC has three principal functions: investigation of allegations of corrupt conduct, corruption prevention and education.

To assist in informing and monitoring the impact of its corruption prevention and education activities, the ICAC has periodically conducted surveys of the NSW community. These community attitude surveys have been used to gauge the public's perceptions and knowledge regarding corruption and the ICAC. These surveys have been conducted periodically since 1993, and most recently in 2003.

The specific items included in the community attitude survey have varied over time to address particular issues of interest at the time each survey was administered. The 2006 survey investigated the public's perceptions of the extent of corruption and what activities they believe constitute corruption, their personal experiences of corruption and issues related to reporting corruption. The survey also focussed on the public's knowledge of the ICAC, its roles and their views of its effectiveness. Within each of these topic areas there was a set of core questions which have been asked previously and can be used to examine trends in the public's attitudes over time.

This report provides the findings from the 2006 community attitude survey which was administered in May–June 2006.

Methodology

The survey instrument used in 2003 was reviewed and some modifications were incorporated for the 2006 instrument. These primarily included adding follow-up questions from some items to gain further details of participants' views. Additionally, some items were reworded or deleted and others introduced so that the research instrument would more closely address current issues of interest to the ICAC.

An external contractor, Taverner Research, was engaged to administer the survey on behalf of the ICAC. The contractor provided input into the survey items and conducted initial piloting of the survey instrument with ten participants. This procedure involved participants providing feedback regarding their interpretation of the questions and discussions about any potential misunderstanding of the questions.

Following some minor revisions arising from the initial piloting, the survey instrument was then further piloted with 16 participants using the actual survey methodology. Some final minor changes were subsequently incorporated.

The survey was administered as a stand-alone telephone survey during a three-week period commencing on 23 May 2006. The sample included residents of NSW aged 18 and over. Telephone numbers were randomly selected from the Telstra White Pages, with quotas to ensure that the sample group was generally representative of the NSW population in terms of gender, age and place of residence.

To maximise the response rate, over 2,000 letters of introduction were sent out to the selected households prior to telephone contact. The letter indicated that Taverner Research would be telephoning and asking for participation in a survey which would address "matters that are important to all residents in NSW". To obtain the required sample, in addition to those households that were mailed information, calls were also made to random telephone numbers without a letter of introduction.

The survey was administered using a Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. All data, including verbatim responses to open-ended questions, was recorded in a database for subsequent analysis. Quotations in the report represent selected verbatim responses, as recorded by the interviewer.

Findings

Demographics

A total of 502 people participated in the survey. This represented an overall response rate of 23 per cent.[2] Where participants had received the letter prior to telephone contact, the response rate was 34 per cent.

The following figures and tables illustrate the demographic characteristics of the sample. Overall, 250 males and 252 females took part in the survey, and had similar age distributions. The age and gender distributions of this sample, and for comparison purposes, the Australian Bureau of Statistics population estimates by age for NSW, are presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Age distribution of survey participants, by gender
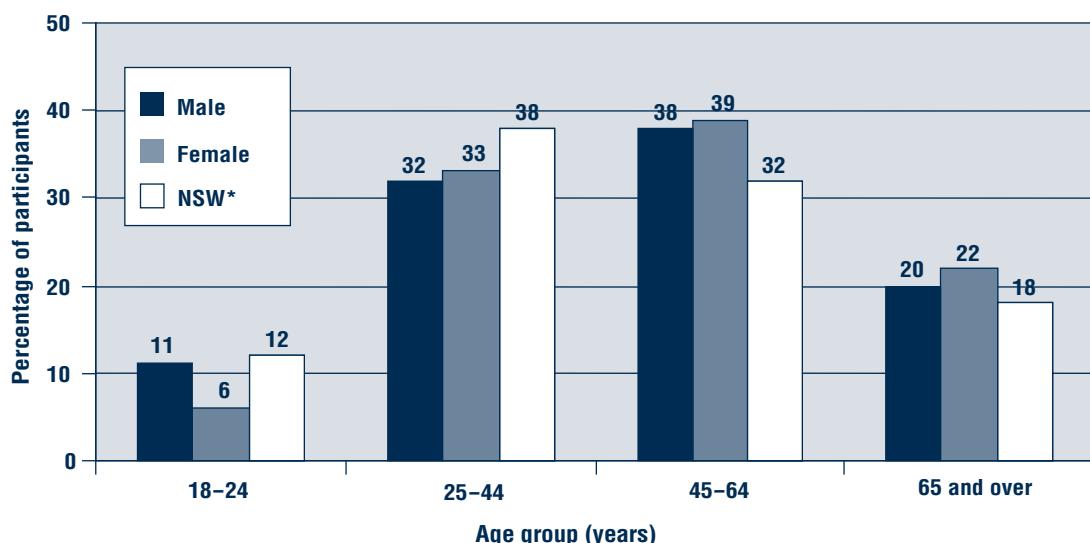
*NSW figures are estimated from ABS (2005).[3]

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2. A total of 2,084 letters were sent, and 1,083 individuals to whom letters were sent were subsequently contacted by telephone. Of those, 366 completed the survey, representing a response rate of 34%. Additionally, 2,017 households were telephoned without a letter being sent first. Of those, 1,077 were contacted, and 136 completed the survey, representing a response rate of 13%.

3. 3235.1.55.001 Population Estimates by Age and Sex, New South Wales by Geographic Classification [ASGC 2005].

As shown in Table 1, most of the participants spoke English as their main language at home. A slightly greater proportion of participants living in Sydney spoke a language other than English than those in other areas of NSW.

Table 1: Participants' location by language spoken at home

	English	Other language	Total
Sydney area	279 (92%)	23 (8%)	302
Rest of NSW	195 (98%)	5 (3%)	200
Total	474	28	502

The vast majority of participants had lived in NSW for five or more years, with only 4 per cent having been a resident for less than five years.

Table 2: Participants' length of time residing in NSW

	Less than one year	One to two years	Three to five years	More than five years
Number	7 (1%)	5 (1%)	9 (2%)	481 (96%)

The largest proportion of participants was in paid employment in the private sector (see Figure 2). This was closely followed by those who were not in paid employment. Relatively few participants were currently employed in the NSW or Commonwealth public sectors or both public and private sectors.

Figure 2: Participants' employment sector by gender
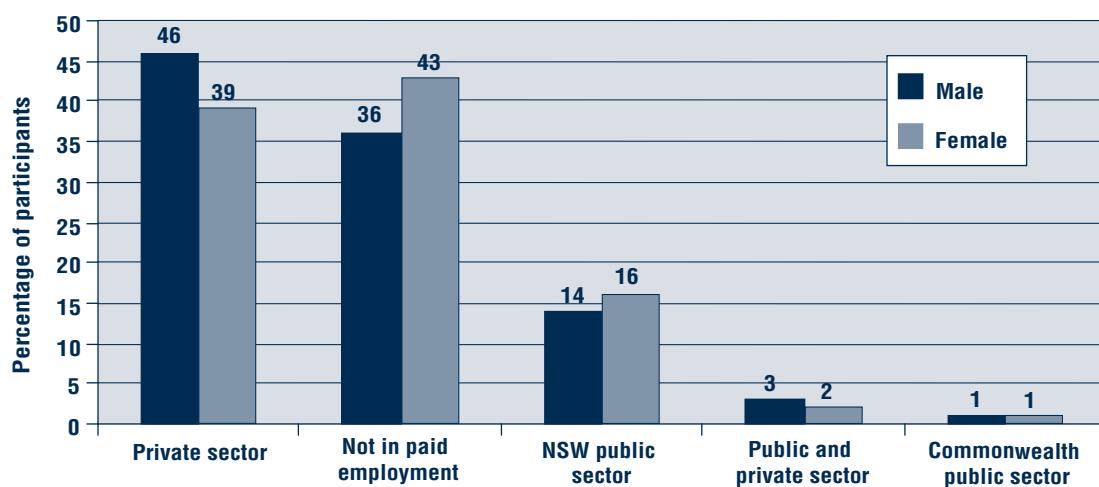
Main source of news

In addition to the primary demographic details collected, participants were asked what their main source of news was and how frequently they accessed it. This question was included because several questions in the survey addressed issues related to the ICAC in the media. The most frequently identified sources of news are shown in Table 3. About one-third used commercial television as their main news source, followed by the ABC television news and the *Sydney Morning Herald.* The majority (71 per cent) indicated that they accessed their main source of general news on a daily basis.

**Table 3: Participants' primary source of news**

Source	Number (per cent) accessing source
Commercial TV news	172 (34%)
ABC TV news	63 (13%)
Sydney Morning Herald	60 (12%)
Daily Telegraph	34 (7%)
Commercial radio news	23 (5%)
Commercial TV general	21 (4%)

Perceptions of corruption

As in previous surveys, the participants were asked to rate how serious a problem they felt corruption is in the NSW public sector. Although relatively stable until 1999, since that time there appears to have been a reduction in the proportion of people believing that corruption is a problem (either major or minor) (see Figure 3). Indeed, there was a significant difference in the proportion of participants who felt it was a problem in 2003 and 2006.[4] This, combined with the significant difference between the proportions who felt it was a problem in 1999 and 2003,[5] suggests that there has been a reduction in the number of people who perceive corruption to be a problem since 1999. Table 4 shows the proportion of people who responded to each of the categories offered.

4. $\chi^2 = 16.0, df = 1, n = 1002, p < .001$
5. $\chi^2 = 23.7, df = 1, n = 1014, p < .001$

Figure 3: Perception that corruption is a problem in NSW, 1993–2006
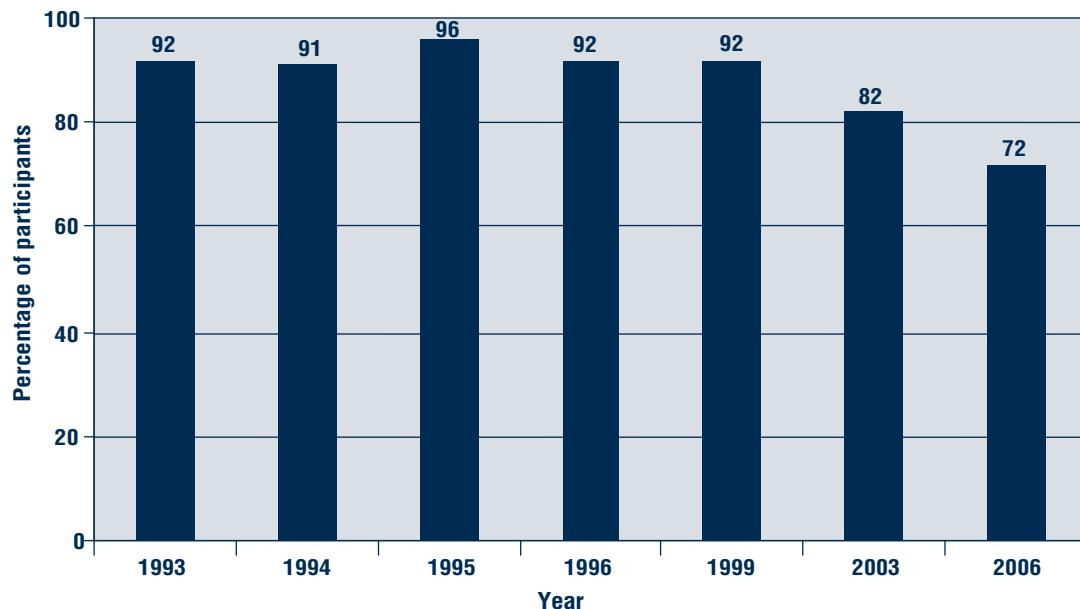
Table 4: Per cent of participants indicating the extent to which they perceived corruption to be a problem in NSW, 1993–2006

	Major problem	Minor problem	Not a problem	Don't know	N
1993	55%	37%	4%	4%	502
1994	44%	47%	4%	5%	402
1995	58%	38%	1%	3%	515
1996	49%	43%	4%	4%	511
1999	55%	37%	3%	5%	514
2003	31%	51%	9%	9%	500
2006	26%	46%	18%	11%	502

In addition to the above question, for the first time participants were asked about their perception of the extent to which corruption is a problem within NSW government departments and local councils respectively (see Table 5). These responses were then compared to the rate reported for the NSW public sector overall.[6] Compared to this rate, corruption in local councils was perceived by participants as a problem (minor or major) significantly more often.[7] The perceptions of corruption as a problem in government departments did not differ significantly from the overall rate.

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6. A binomial test was used for this analysis which compared the observed response distributions for government departments and local councils to the rate of 72%, which was the percentage of participants who saw corruption as a major or minor problem for the NSW public sector overall.

7. Binomial test, $p < .005$

Table 5: Number (and per cent) of participants indicating the degree to which they feel corruption is a problem within different government sectors

	Major problem	Minor problem	Not a problem	Don't know	*N*
NSW public sector overall	129 (26%)	229 (46%)	90 (18%)	54 (11%)	502
Government departments	134 (27%)	237 (47%)	80 (16%)	51 (10%)	502
Local councils	177 (35%)	213 (42%)	72 (14%)	40 (8%)	502

Perceived prevalence of various activities in the public sector

A new set of questions was introduced in the 2006 survey which asked participants to indicate if they believed various nominated activities commonly occur within the NSW public sector. Where a participant indicated that at least two activities were common, he or she was asked to identify which they felt was the most common.

Overall, the three activities which were thought to be common by the largest number of people were favouritism, misuse of public resources and failure to disclose a conflict of interest (see Table 6). It should be noted that all activities, except falsifying information/ forgery, were thought to be common by over half the participants.

Table 6: Number (and per cent) of participants indicating their belief about the occurrence of various activities in the NSW public sector

Activity*	Yes	No	Unsure
Favouritism	424 (84%)	49 (10%)	29 (6%)
Misuse of public resources	400 (80%)	74 (15%)	28 (6%)
Failure to disclose conflict of interest	377 (75%)	86 (17%)	39 (8%)
Improper use of confidential information	344 (69%)	112 (22%)	46 (9%)
Theft of public resources	310 (62%)	130 (26%)	62 (12%)
Bribery	309 (62%)	140 (28%)	53 (11%)
Breach of agency's policy	293 (58%)	126 (25%)	83 (17%)
Falsifying information, forgery or fraud	243 (48%)	192 (38%)	67 (13%)

*Activities are ranked by per cent of participants indicating 'yes', not in the order they were presented to the participants. The types of activities were presented to the participants using the wording as indicated in the table.

When asked to indicate which was the most common, the largest proportion of participants reported either misuse of public resources or favouritism (see Table 7).

Table 7: Number (and per cent) of participants indicating which nominated activity they felt was the most common

Activity	Number (and per cent) indicating activity to be the most frequent
Misuse of public resources	128 (27%)
Favouritism	106 (22%)
Failure to disclose conflict of interest	49 (10%)
Improper use of confidential information	44 (9%)
Bribery	40 (8%)
Theft of public resources	33 (7%)
Falsifying information/forgery/fraud	24 (5%)
Breach of agency's policy	17 (4%)
None of the above	32 (7%)

Definitions of corruption

A question asking participants to define corruption was first introduced in the 2003 survey. Similar to the results in 2003, 55 per cent of participants in the 2006 survey indicated that it involves some form of personal and usually financial gain. This included accepting money/gratuities or bribes, "lining their own pocket" or abusing the system / position for personal gain/financial benefit. A total of 124 people (25 per cent) suggested that corruption involves something illegal, dishonest or wrong. The third most common inclusion in the definition was that it involves the abuse or mismanagement of power (reported by 22 per cent of participants).

Definitions of corruption:

Taking bribes, being influenced by someone else to do certain things whether it be for personal/financial gain/further your career.

That they are not doing the right thing by the people.

Anyone that abuses the power – anyone that uses what rights they have at work – policemen and councilmen that make decisions such as where they know they have an interest in something – shareholder in a company – and make a decision based on it.

Illegal practice, individuals looking to profit from deceptive practice.

People taking advantage of the position to obtain personal advantage.

Dodgy deals, underhand money, things like that.

What does corruption include?

In this survey a new section was added to identify the range of activities which participants believe might constitute corruption (see Table 8). Most participants agreed that looking up driver's licence information for a friend or taking someone out to lunch who was about to make a decision about the person offering the lunch were examples of corruption. Half the participants felt that using work time and resources to photocopy weekly flyers for children's sporting teams constituted corruption.

Table 8: Number (and per cent) of participants indicating their beliefs as to whether various activities constitute corruption

Activity	Yes*	No	Unsure
A public official looks up driver's licence information in response to a request from a friend	417 (83%)	69 (14%)	16 (3%)
A person hoping for a quick approval from a government agency takes the person who will make the decision out to lunch	361 (72%)	120 (24%)	21 (4%)
A public official uses work time and resources for photocopying weekly notices to be distributed to his or her child's sports team	253 (50%)	230 (46%)	19 (4%)
A public official looks up holiday accommodation on the internet during his or her lunch break at work	79 (16%)	411 (82%)	12 (2%)
A public official tags a holiday on the end of work-related trip at his or her own expense	65 (13%)	427 (85%)	10 (2%)

*Activities are rank ordered in frequency of participants who saw the activity as corrupt, not in the order they were presented to the participants.

Personal experiences of corruption

To provide an estimate of the public's direct and indirect exposure to corruption, participants were asked about their personal experiences of corruption (see Table 9). They were asked about matters they had witnessed first-hand and which they believed involved corruption. Participants were also asked about matters involving corruption which they had heard about from people they knew.

The questions about participants' direct experience of corrupt behaviour had first been asked in 2003 where 19 per cent claimed to have personally experienced such behaviour. This is the same figure observed in the current results. The second question was new to this survey and thus cannot be compared with previous surveys.

Table 9: Number (and per cent) of participants who indicated they have experienced or heard about something that they felt was corrupt in the NSW public sector

	Yes	No	Unsure
Ever experienced somebody in NSW public sector doing something you thought was corrupt?	97 (19%)	404 (80%)	1 (0%)
Ever heard from other people you know about somebody in NSW public sector doing something you thought was corrupt?	198 (39%)	297 (59%)	7 (1%)

Of those who felt they had first-hand experience, the most common type of behaviour they said they had witnessed was favouritism (reported by 12 people). Other reported activities included incorrect use of services/people helping themselves to service/additional privileges (nine people), being influenced/coerced by others to do favours (seven people) and accepting money or bribes (six people). Just under half of those people who reported having first-hand experience indicated that it had happened five or more years previously.

Approximately twice as many people indicated that they had heard about such activities from someone they knew. For these instances, the most common activities reported were: a council dealing with development applications/rezoning of land (24 people); favouritism of people/using friends/relatives (22 people); accepting money/gratuities/bribes (18 people) and incorrect use of services/helping oneself to services/additional privileges (15 people). The median length of time since participants had heard about the event was one year.

Does corruption personally affect the participants?

Participants were also asked if they believed corruption affected themselves or their family, and if so, in what way (see Table 10). As this question had been asked across a number of previous surveys, comparisons over time can be made.

Table 10: Does corruption affect participant or his or her family in any way?

Year	Yes	No	Unsure
1994	46%	48%	6%
1996	56%	36%	8%
1999	63%	34%	3%
2003	48%	46%	6%
2006	42%	48%	9%

The 2006 survey recorded the lowest percentage of people who felt they were affected by corruption in some way. Of those who felt it did affect them, the most commonly reported ways were in the sense that corruption affected everyone (e.g. as taxpayers, the whole community, it corrupts the whole system or society) (13 per cent) or that it results in funds or money being directed or allocated to the wrong channels (10 per cent). Some other ways cited by a number of people included corruption resulting in a reduction in public services, decreased levels of service and people having to pay more tax.

> **How participants are affected by corruption:**
>
> *In a general sense that government affects me. I am affected by public organisations and they are playing an increasing role in my life.*
>
> *Taxpayer. It costs me money.*
>
> *It will increase the cost of services.*
>
> *At a local government level, decisions about development/local development such as new buildings, because the process is not transparent and favours the developers.*

Attitudes to reporting corruption

A series of items addressed the likelihood of corruption being reported as well as the perceived barriers to and consequences of reporting corruption (see Table 11).

Ninety-two per cent of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that "it is okay to report corruption in the NSW public sector". Although a similar question was asked previously, the wording had been changed for this survey. In 2003 the statement read "it is okay to report or complain about corruption in the public service". The wording for the item had been revised to ensure that participants would only be considering reporting of corruption (as opposed to complaining, which may be interpreted as either making an official complaint or discussing the matter with friends or family without also reporting it officially).

Most people also believed that it was their responsibility to report corruption (88 per cent). This was a similar level to that in 2003, when 89 per cent felt that they had some responsibility to report corruption (although the question was changed from a negative to a positive statement for the 2006 survey).

On the other hand, fewer than half of participants (49 per cent) felt that something useful would be done if they reported corruption. This question too had been changed for the 2006 survey. Participants in previous surveys had been required to

express their level of agreement with the statement "there is no point in reporting corruption because nothing useful will be done." This is a narrower question than the one used in the current survey, as it appears to exclude individuals who believe that there is a point to reporting corruption even if nothing is done (e.g. because it is the right thing to do).

Fewer than half the participants believed that they personally could do something about corruption. Again, this item had been phrased differently in previous surveys.

Table 11: Attitudes to reporting corruption

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Unsure
*It is okay to report corruption in the public service	245 (49%)	217 (43%)	27 (5%)	5 (1%)	8 (2%)
*It's my responsibility to report corruption	138 (27%)	303 (60%)	38 (8%)	4 (1%)	19 (4%)
*If I reported corruption … something useful would be done	37 (7%)	209 (42%)	163 (32%)	36 (7%)	57 (11%)
*I personally can do something about corruption in the NSW public sector	38 (8%)	151 (30%)	214 (43%)	77 (15%)	22 (4%)

*Phrasing of the item had been changed from the 2003 survey, so direct comparisons with those results cannot be made.

> **Reasons for believing that "it's my responsibility to report corruption":**
>
> *If I don't report it and the next person does not report it, no one will know.*
>
> *If we don't report, society will be dominated by such corruption, thereby affecting everyone's lives.*

One potential barrier to reporting corruption is a concern about retribution. In this survey well over half the participants believed that people who report corruption are likely to suffer for it (see Figure 4). Although there appeared to be a reduction in this perception from 1999 to 2003, the 2006 values were significantly higher than those in 2003[8] and not significantly different from those in 1999.[9] This suggests that the 2003 value may have been anomalous rather than indicative of a major change of perceptions.

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8. $\chi^2 = 12.02$, $df = 1$, $n = 1002$, $p < .01$
9. $\chi^2 = 0.35$, $df = 1$, $n = 1016$, n.s.

Figure 4: Per cent of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that those who report corruption are likely to suffer for it, 1993–2006

<div style="background-color:#d5dbe1; padding:10px;">
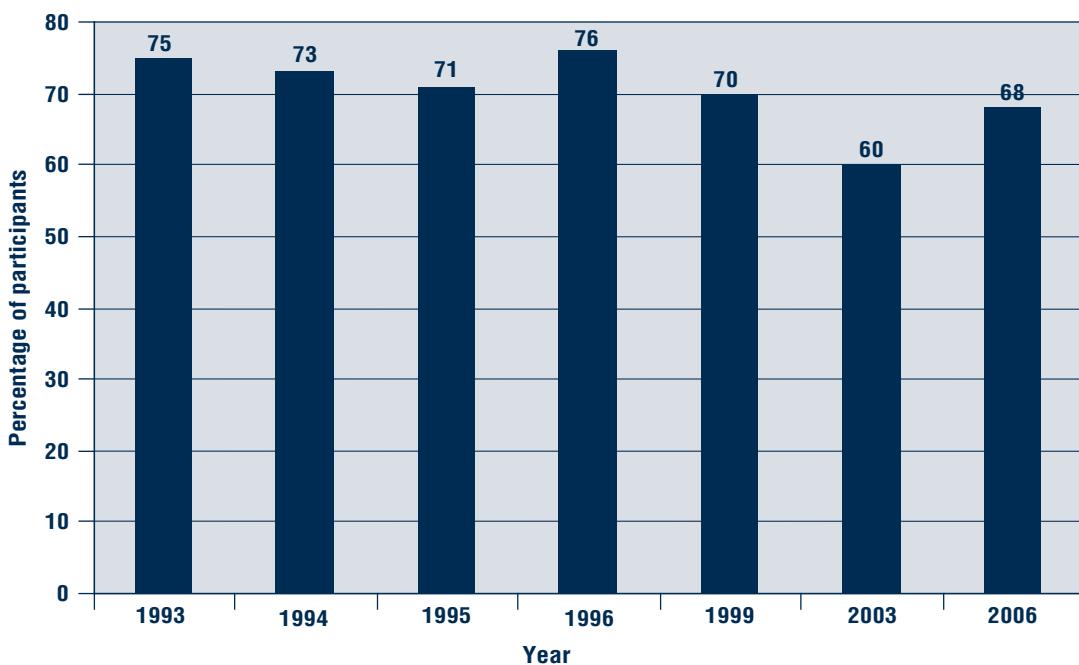
Reasons why people think those who report corruption are likely to suffer for it:

I feel that you can get hurt. If you live in a council and own a business they can turn things around on you. You do what you can, some corruption you can report and end up putting you in hot water and the other person gets off scot free, particularly if the person is in a higher position.

I've seen it happen in the news and on television. Whistleblowers get the rough end of the pineapple every time.

</div>

Likelihood of reporting corruption

For the 2006 survey, the ICAC asked participants if they believed they knew where to report corruption if they had information about it. One-third of the sample (33 per cent) believed they knew where to report it. A similar question was asked in 2003, and 34 per cent thought they knew where to report it.

The participants were also asked about the likelihood that they would report corruption if they identified it, who they would report it to and what might influence their decision. This question was asked for two conditions: where the corruption was serious (something that might result in a criminal conviction) and where it was less serious.

Overall, 83 per cent of the participants indicated that they were likely or very likely to report serious corruption (Table 12). Where the corruption was thought to be less serious, the percentage of people who indicated they would report fell to 42 per cent.

When this question was first introduced in 2003, it concerned the likelihood of reporting corruption but did not differentiate between serious and less serious corruption. In 2003, 71 per cent indicated they would be willing to report corruption, that appears to be consistent with the 2006 findings, as the 2003 value falls within the range for the two questions asked in this survey. It is possible that in 2003 some participants responded to the question with serious corruption in mind whereas others interpreted the question to include or refer to less serious corruption.

Table 12: Likelihood of reporting corruption

How likely to report	Very likely	Likely	Unlikely	Very unlikely	Unsure	Depends
Serious corruption	214 (43%)	202 (40%)	39 (8%)	14 (3%)	12 (2%)	21 (4%)
Less serious corruption	57 (11%)	156 (31%)	215 (43%)	45 (9%)	8 (2%)	21 (4%)

The participants, except those who indicated that they were unlikely or very unlikely to report, were asked to indicate to whom they would report it. For both serious and less serious corruption, the Police were nominated by most participants (see Table 13).

Table 13: Five most frequently nominated places to report corruption (per cent of responses)

Corruption seriousness	Proportion of responses				
Serious corruption (*n*=450)	Police (53%)	Ombudsman (19%)	Member of Parliament (8%)	ICAC (7%)	At work – to manager etc. (6%)
Less serious corruption (*n*=243)	Police (21%)	• Ombudsman (14%) • At work – to manager etc. (14%)		Member of Parliament (11%)	At work to CEO or equivalent (10%)

Participants were also asked what might influence their decision to report corruption. The most common factors were the seriousness of the matter (146 people, 29 per cent), if it would personally affect themselves or their family (67 people, 13 per cent), the effect of the corruption on other people (e.g. if people's lives were in danger) (59 people, 12 per cent) and concerns about backlash or other effects on their family (48 people, 10 per cent).

What would influence the decision whether or not to report corruption:
Depends on what it is. If someone would get injured or hurt in some way would report it. If costing me as a taxpayer and will continue, would report it.
Level of importance, in my conscience, how important I think it is, if I didn't think it's important I wouldn't report it. Whether you think it's right or wrong.
If I knew where to go without endangering myself.
It's my duty as a citizen of the country to report it.
I would not because I would not want to risk my neck.
It depends on how severe it is, really.
I have a belief in fairness, and I think if someone was doing fairly bad I would report it. Minor things not so much. The thing that would influence me most is a notion of fairness.

Awareness and perceptions of the ICAC

Knowledge of the ICAC

A series of questions were asked regarding participants' knowledge of the ICAC, its functions and effectiveness.

When asked to identify the name of the body set up by the government to deal with corruption in the NSW public sector, 149 people (30 per cent) were able to name the ICAC without prompting. This value did not differ from that in the 2003 survey. However, the 2003 value was significantly lower than that in 1999 (see Table 14).[10]

Where participants were not able to name the ICAC they were then asked if they had heard of the "ICAC", the "I.C.A.C." or the "Independent Commission Against Corruption". Of those, 263 indicated that they recognised the agency. In total, therefore, 412 (82 per cent) of the sample was familiar with the ICAC either through recall or recognition. This value was significantly lower that that in 2003 (see Table 14).[11] Indeed, it appears that the percentage of the participants who report that they recognise the ICAC has generally decreased since early surveys.

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10. $\chi^2 = 30.18$, $df = 1$, $n = 1014$, $p < .001$
11. $\chi^2 = 6.42$, $df = 1$, $n = 1002$, $p < .025$

Table 14: Percentage of participants able to correctly name or identify the ICAC, 1993–2006

Year	1993	1994	1995	1996	1999	2003	2006
Name the ICAC	42	45	47	38	44	28	30
Recognise the ICAC	95	92	92	92	89	88	82

The questions regarding the ICAC's functions and effectiveness were only asked of those participants who were able to initially recall the name of the ICAC or who recognised it when provided with its name. Participants who indicated that they had not heard of the ICAC were not included in this part of the survey.

When asked what they thought the ICAC does, the type of activity most frequently nominated (by 253 respondents) was investigation in some form.

What the ICAC does:

I suppose they do detective work and that kind of thing. It could represent people in court.

Looks into and makes any reports on corruption, is supposed to follow up on it.

Investigates reports of corruption.

At the moment I think it mainly gets involved in political matters/ I don't really know what they are doing.

They are an independent body that investigates corruption.

They try to stamp out corruption and deal with the problems associated with corruption.

Try and stop corruption in the public services.

Of all the comments about what the ICAC does (504 in total, made by 412 respondents), only 49 were negative. Most of these (29) concerned perceptions of ineffectiveness.

What the ICAC does:

Well it's supposed to prevent corruption or act upon it, but I suspect it's a bit of a toothless tiger

Nothing very instrumental.

Don't go after big enough fish to justify their services. They investigate smaller people than ones at the top.

Knowledge about the roles of the ICAC

In surveys conducted since 1996, a series of questions was asked regarding the jurisdiction of the ICAC. Participants were asked to indicate if they believed particular statements to be true, false, or if they were unsure.

In 2006 two versions of each statement were prepared, with either true or false as the correct option. Participants were randomly allocated one version of the items to assess the possible contribution of participants' "tendency to acquiesce".[12] This tendency might inflate the percentage of people who answered correctly or incorrectly depending upon how the question was phrased.

The results are shown in Table 15. For each pair of items, the percentage of participants who answered correctly is shown in bold. There appeared to be a higher proportion of participants having the correct response when "true" was the correct answer rather than "false". This is consistent with some participants having the tendency to acquiesce. However, the extent of this effect tended to vary across items.

Table 15: Participants' agreement with statements regarding the ICAC's jurisdiction[13]

	True	False	Unsure
The ICAC is the corruption body for whole of Australia	82 (38%)	**85 (40%)**	47 (22%)
The ICAC is the corruption body for NSW and not the rest of Australia	**101 (53%)**	56 (28%)	41 (21%)
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption in NSW local government	**176 (82%)**	11 (5%)	27 (13%)
The ICAC cannot investigate allegations of corruption in NSW local government	17 (9%)	**148 (75%)**	33 (17%)
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption in the private sector even when the corruption has nothing to do with the public sector	92 (43%)	**61 (29%)**	61 (29%)
The ICAC cannot investigate allegations of corruption in the private sector even when the corruption has nothing to do with the public sector	**66 (33%)**	81 (41%)	51 (26%)
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption against NSW politicians	**184 (86%)**	8 (4%)	22 (10%)
The ICAC cannot investigate allegations of corruption against NSW politicians	23 (12%)	**153 (77%)**	22 (11%)
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption against NSW judges and magistrates	**136 (64%)**	30 (14%)	48 (22%)
The ICAC cannot investigate allegations of corruption against NSW judges and magistrates	32 (16%)	**124 (63%)**	42 (21%)
The ICAC has the power to prosecute people[14]	119 (56%)	**57 (27%)**	38 (18%)
The ICAC does not have the power to prosecute people[14]	**60 (30%)**	106 (54%)	32 (16%)
The ICAC is independent of the government of the day	**165 (77%)**	21 (10%)	28 (13%)
The ICAC is not independent of the government of the day	40 (20%)	**141 (71%)**	17 (9%)

12. Individuals may sometimes answer "true" more often than "false" to a true/false question, as they may exhibit a tendency to agree with the interviewer.

13. The numbers in bold indicate the correct option.

14. Relating to this pair of items, technically the ICAC has the power to prosecute as it issues Court Attendance Notices. However, in practice the Director of Public Prosecutions has responsibility for conducting the prosecution in court and it is this aspect of the prosecution which would most likely correspond to the public's understanding of the term. This is the sense in which the term "prosecute" is used throughout this document.

Where the identical wording was used previously, the results can be compared across community attitude surveys. These values are presented in Table 16. As can be seen, the values tended to remain relatively constant between 2003 and 2006. For most of the items, fewer people answered correctly in 2003 than in 1999. The notable exception was that more people answered the item regarding local government correctly in 2003 than 1999.

Table 16: Percentage of participants correctly identifying statements regarding the ICAC's jurisdiction, 1996–2006

Statement	1996	1999	2003	2006
The ICAC is the corruption body for whole of Australia	59%	56%	42%[15]	40%
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption in NSW local government	80%	81%	86%[16]	82%
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption in the private sector even when the corruption has nothing to do with the public sector	35%	44%	30%[17]	29%
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption against NSW politicians	84%	90%	81%[18]	86%
The ICAC can investigate allegations of corruption against NSW judges and magistrates	74%	77%	71%[19]	64%
The ICAC has the power to prosecute people	41%	53%	28%[20]	27%
The ICAC is independent of the government of the day	NA	NA	74%	77%

NA – Data not available as this question was not asked prior to 2003.

Accessing information about the ICAC

In the 2006 survey, the people who indicated that they were aware of the ICAC were asked how they would find out more about the ICAC if they needed to. Their responses were categorised by age and are presented in Table 17.

Table 17: Preferred method of finding more information about the ICAC, by age

Age group	Internet	Phone/Phone book	Other	Don't know
18–24	16 (84%)	1 (5%)	3 (16%)	1 (5%)
25–44	110 (84%)	17 (13%)	11 (8%)	7 (5%)
45–64	122 (71%)	39 (23%)	19 (11%)	25 (14%)
65 or older	25 (28%)	25 (28%)	24 (27%)	25 (28%)

15. $\chi^2 = 19.18$, $df = 1$, $n = 897$, $p < .001$ (2003 versus 1999)
16. $\chi^2 = 4.86$, $df = 1$, $n = 897$, $p < .001$ (2003 versus 1999)
17. $\chi^2 = 21.90$, $df = 1$, $n = 897$, $p < .001$ (2003 versus 1999)
18. $\chi^2 = 12.90$, $df = 1$, $n = 897$, $p < .001$ (2003 versus 1999)
19. $\chi^2 = 4.62$, $df = 1$, $n = 897$, $p < .05$ (2003 versus 1999)
20. $\chi^2 = 59.29$, $df = 1$, $n = 897$, $p < .001$ (2003 versus 1999)

The preferred method for finding out more information was dependent on age.[21] As can be seen, the proportion of people who preferred the internet decreased with age. This corresponded to an increase in the proportion of people using the telephone. There also tended to be an increase in the numbers who were not sure how to go about getting more information about the ICAC as age increased. Responses in the "other" category included friends or family, going to the library, local council or a Member of Parliament.

In 2006, these participants were also asked if they had ever read any of the materials produced by the ICAC. Just under one-fifth indicated that they had read ICAC material (see Table 18). Of those who could recall what it was about, the most common response was reading about a current investigation (28 participants).

Table 18: Number (and per cent) of participants who reported having read ICAC material

Have you ever read any ICAC material?	Number (%)
Yes	80 (19%)
No	319 (77%)
Unsure	13 (3%)

Twenty-one people indicated that they had had other contact with the ICAC. Five indicated that they had been involved in some aspect of an enquiry, four knew someone who either worked at the ICAC or was involved in the ICAC in some way. Two people had met with the ICAC through work, two had reported information to the ICAC and two had been requested by the ICAC to provide information.

In a new question, participants in the 2006 survey were asked if they had visited the ICAC website. A total of 32 people (8 per cent) indicated that they had. Of these, about half indicated that they were looking for general information and about 13 per cent used it in connection to study (i.e. assignments or homework).

The 412 participants were asked to indicate their willingness to provide information to the ICAC about serious and less serious corruption (see Table 19).[22] Generally there was a willingness to report information to the ICAC, with 86 per cent willing to provide information regarding serious corruption, and 56 per cent willing to provide information on less serious corruption. This question had been asked in 2003, although it was not qualified by the degree of seriousness of the corrupt conduct. In that survey, 82 per cent indicated that they would be willing to provide information to the ICAC.

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21. $\chi^2 = 72.82$, $df = 9$, $n = 412$, $p < .001$

22. This question specifically asked those participants who were aware of the ICAC about willingness to report information to the ICAC. All participants had also been asked about their overall willingness to report information regarding corruption (see Table 12).

Table 19: Participants' reported willingness to report information to the ICAC

| Willingness to provide the ICAC with information about	Very willing	Fairly willing	Fairly unwilling	Very unwilling	Not sure
Serious corruption	173 (42%)	181 (44%)	30 (7%)	9 (2%)	19 (5%)
Less serious corruption	69 (17%)	160 (39%)	113 (27%)	40 (10%)	30 (7%)

The ICAC's performance

Of the 412 people who recalled or recognised the ICAC, 93 per cent indicated that they thought having the ICAC was a good thing for the people of NSW (see Table 20).

Table 20: Participants' belief that the ICAC is a good thing for NSW

Statement	Yes	No	Unsure
Having the ICAC is a good thing for the people of NSW	382 (93%)	18 (4%)	12 (3%)

This percentage has remained remarkably stable since the survey was first conducted in 1993 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Percentage of participants who believe that having the ICAC is a good thing for NSW, 1993–2006
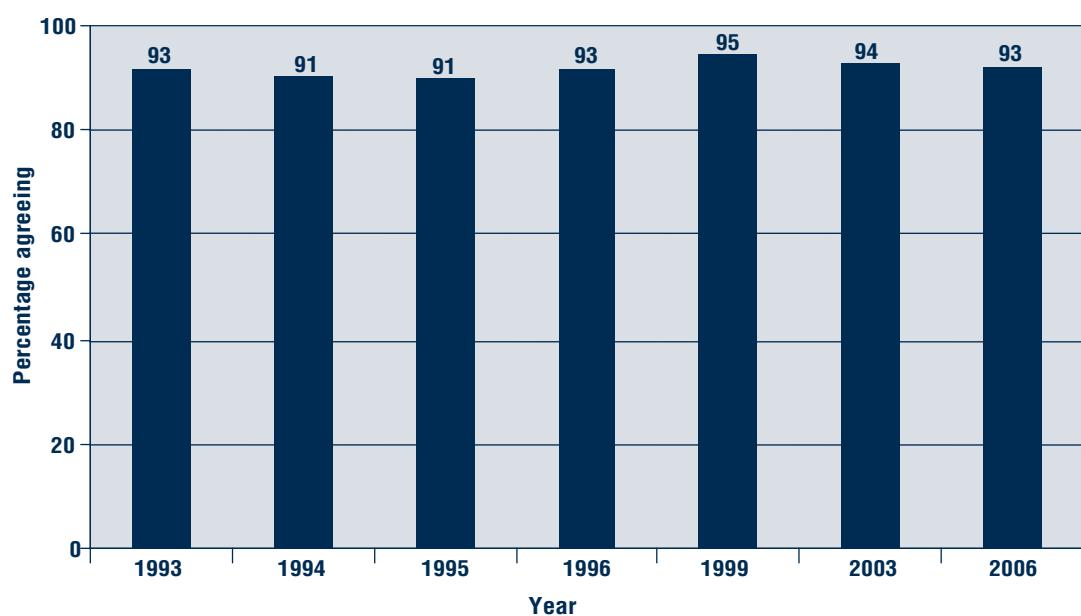
The reasons they provided included that having such an organisation can only be a good thing, it is good to have an independent body, the fact that the ICAC carries out investigations, it is good to have someone to keep an eye on things and the ICAC's preventive function.

Why having the ICAC is a good thing for the people of NSW:

To help stop or prevent corruption when it occurs and to act as a deterrent if people know that they might be investigated.

If we don't have somebody looking after these things corruption will get out of hand.

Somebody to keep people honest.

Giving people an avenue to put facts forward and to hope justice is done.

Of those who thought that it was not good for NSW (4 per cent), the most common reasons related to not seeing any evidence of outcomes.

Why having the ICAC is not a good thing for the people of NSW:

Their high costs and I don't think that there is any positive outcome at the end.

Participants were also asked about the ICAC's success in exposing corruption and in reducing corruption. Responses are summarised in Table 21 below. Again, this question was asked only of those participants who had either recalled or recognised the ICAC.

Table 21: Participants' views regarding the success of the ICAC

How successful has the ICAC been in	Successful	Unsuccessful	Not sure
Exposing some of the corruption in NSW	298 (72%)	34 (8%)	80 (19%)
Reducing the level of the corruption in NSW	220 (53%)	85 (21%)	107 (26%)

Almost three-quarters of the participants felt the ICAC was successful in exposing corruption, but just over half felt it was successful in reducing corruption. The large proportion of participants who indicated that they were not certain might reflect the difficulty in estimating what the level of corruption actually is. The responses to these two questions were similar to those in previous years (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Perceptions of the ICAC as successful in exposing or reducing corruption, 1993–2006
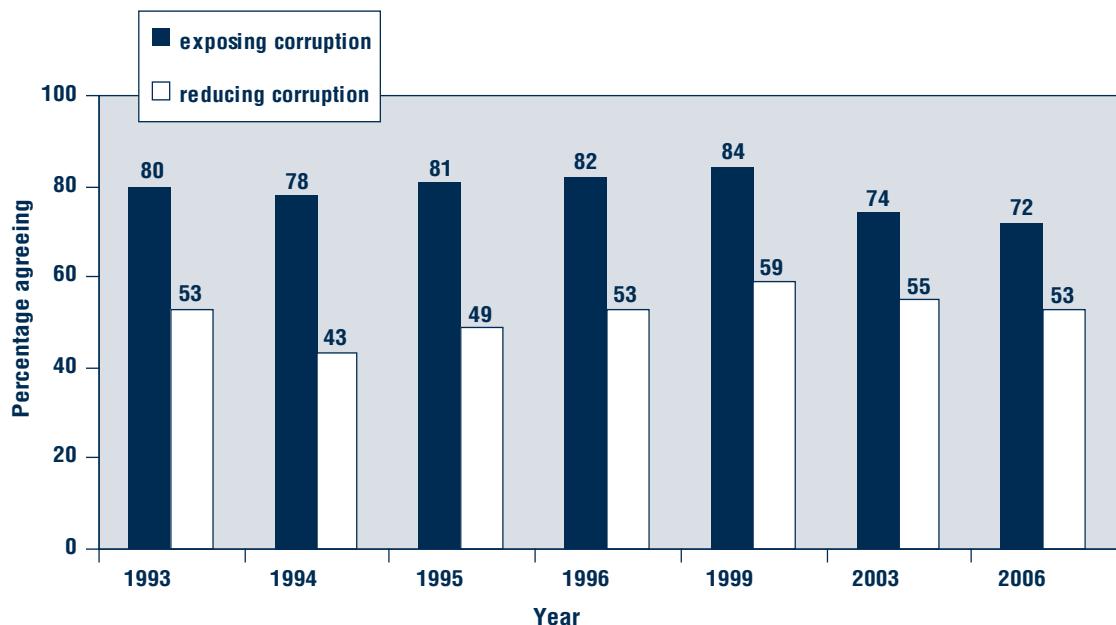
Reasons provided for indicating that the ICAC was successful in exposing or reducing corruption related to what people had heard in the news (41 comments, 10 per cent), and the idea that having the ICAC is a deterrent (57 comments, 14 per cent).

Reasons for saying the ICAC has been successful in reducing corruption in NSW:

Well from what I have seen in the media there have been high-profile cases with participants from the public service that have been held accountable for acts of corruption.

It's always on the news.

The mere fact it is there, it is a deterrent.

I think that having an independent organisation makes people think twice about their behaviours.

Reasons for saying the ICAC has not been successful or for being unsure of its success in reducing corruption in NSW:

Cause it is going on everywhere in front of us at the highest level.

I don't know what the level of corruption would be with it. I can't say what the level of corruption was before.

The ICAC in the media

The participants who were aware of the ICAC (*n* = 412) were asked to identify where they had heard of the ICAC. They could nominate as many sources as appropriate. As shown in Table 22, the most common sources were television news (commercial and ABC) and the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Table 22: Most frequently reported source of information about the ICAC

Source*	Number (and per cent) of participants
Commercial TV news	201 (49%)
ABC TV news	128 (31%)
Sydney Morning Herald	124 (30%)
Daily Telegraph	76 (18%)
Commercial TV current affairs shows	69 (17%)
ABC TV current affairs shows	64 (16%)

*More than one source could be nominated.

Participants were asked if they recalled reading or hearing about the ICAC in the previous month.[23] Less than 10 per cent had recalled hearing about the ICAC in the previous month (see Table 23). Of those who did, most could not recall what the story was about.

Table 23: Participants' who have heard about the ICAC in the last month

	Yes	No	Unsure
Heard about ICAC in the last month	35 (8%)	348 (84%)	29 (7%)

Recall of particular news stories

It was possible that participants were aware of news events related to investigations conducted by the ICAC, but did not associate them with the organisation. Thus, all 502 survey participants were asked about a number of news stories (all of which involved ICAC public inquiries), and were asked to indicate if they had heard about them. As shown in Table 24, 'Orange Grove' was recognised by 80 per cent of the participants, and the acceptance of money by the former Mayor of Strathfield in relation to a development was recalled by 55 per cent. The other news stories, which had been less well publicised, were recalled by fewer participants.

Examination of the characteristics of those who recalled these news stories indicated that some of these were people who said they were not familiar with the ICAC. However, there were also those who were aware of the ICAC but did not recall particular news stories. This suggests that people may be aware of the stories and issues, but not necessarily associate them directly with the ICAC.

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23. The ICAC had been in various news media in the month prior to the survey. Although reports were on a variety of issues related to the ICAC, the largest media coverage during this time included several reports from the Dubbo/Orange area regarding an upcoming visit by the ICAC, an investigation into community service orders, and media reports concerning international travel by local government staff from the Sydney area.

Table 24: Participants' recall of various news stories involving the ICAC

Story*	Yes	No	Unsure
Liverpool City Council, former Premier and former Minister of Planning (Orange Grove)	400 (80%)	97 (19%)	5 (1%)
Former Mayor of Strathfield receiving cash payments in relation to development of a local car park	274 (55%)	220 (44%)	8 (2%)
Creating false applications for building licences, TAFE qualifications and changes to TAFE academic records	209 (42%)	286 (57%)	7 (1%)
WorkCover officers issuing thousands of false certificates of competency	209 (42%)	282 (56%)	11 (2%)
Former senior staff at University of Newcastle regarding allegations of plagiarism	187 (37%)	308 (61%)	7 (1%)

*The order of the stories presented in the table corresponds to the proportion of participants who recalled them. They were not presented in this order.

Discussion

The sample for the 2006 community attitude survey consisted of approximately equal numbers of males and females, and approximately two-thirds were from the Sydney area. The vast majority had lived in NSW for five or more years. Overall, the participants showed roughly similar demographic characteristics to NSW residents aged 18 years or over as a whole, and thus their views may be considered to be broadly representative of the wider community's views.

The results from this survey suggested that many views regarding corruption and the ICAC have remained relatively stable. However, there were some notable differences between these results and results from previous surveys. Additionally, a number of new questions were included in the 2006 survey which allowed further investigation into the views of the public regarding corruption and the ICAC. These two aspects of the survey findings are the focus of this discussion.

In 2003 and again in 2006 there was a lower proportion of participants than in previous surveys who believed that corruption was a problem in NSW. It is interesting to note that in 2006 the proportion of people who believed that corruption personally affected themselves or their family was lower than in previous surveys. The results, however, do not allow determination of whether this change in perception corresponds to any actual difference in corruption or its effects on the public.

The results suggest that there may be a perception that corruption may be a slightly greater issue in local government than in the public sector generally. One possible explanation for this difference in perceptions is related to the greater level of interaction of the public with their local council on a day-to-day basis than with government departments generally.

Participants thought that some nominated problematic activities were common in the NSW public sector. These questions were new to the survey and were included to help identify what the public sees as areas of concern. Eighty per cent of participants reported that they thought favouritism and misuse of public resources commonly occurred in the NSW public sector.

As previously, participants were able to articulate what they felt corruption involved, with the most common views being that it involved personal and usually financial gain and/or something illegal, dishonest or wrong. In this survey people were also asked to indicate, from a list of examples, which scenarios they felt constituted corruption. Over 80 per cent felt it was corrupt to look up driver's licence information for a friend, and just under three-quarters felt it was corrupt to take a decision-maker out to lunch when he or she was about to make a decision concerning the person. Half the participants felt it was wrong to use work time and resources to photocopy weekly flyers for children's sporting teams. Very few felt it was corrupt to look up holiday information on the internet during lunch at work or tag a holiday on the end of a business trip at the person's own expense. These responses suggest some understanding of the subtle and the distinct differences between various behaviours that may or may not be perceived as corrupt.

Similar to previous studies, a relatively small number of people (19 per cent of participants) reported that they felt they had experienced corrupt behaviour first-hand, and, 39 per cent reported that they had heard about corruption occurring from someone they knew. This finding illustrates the importance of taking the source of information into account when researching perceptions about experiences of corruption.

The proportion of participants who felt that people who report corruption are likely to suffer for it had returned to around the same levels as previously (almost 70 per cent) after an observed reduction in 2003. At the same time, one of the primary reasons provided by participants for being reluctant to report corruption was the possibility of negative consequences for themselves and/or their family. The extent to which personal experience or well-publicised cases of whistleblowers suffering negative consequences might have influenced people's perceptions cannot be determined here. Currently the ICAC is participating as an industry partner in a national study within Australia which is addressing many issues around whistleblowing. Further clarification of the consequences of reporting corruption may be forthcoming from that project.[24]

The percentage of people who were able to initially identify the ICAC without prompting did not differ from 2003, remaining at about 30 per cent. However, the overall proportion of the sample that was familiar with its name was lower, being 82 per cent in 2006. Indeed, there appear to be a continuing reduction in the proportion of people who were familiar with the organisation over the course of the surveys. In this survey some questions were included regarding familiarity with various ICAC investigations which received media attention, as it was hypothesised that people may in fact be aware of the stories concerning corruption but not necessarily identify them as being related to the ICAC. This was borne out: there were indeed participants who reported not being aware of the ICAC but who indicated that they recalled some of the news stories mentioned. On the other

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24. Whistling While They Work is an Australian Research Centre funded Linkages project which is examining various aspects of whistleblowing within the public sector nationally. The project is led by Griffith University. The website address for the project is http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/slrc/whistleblowing/

hand, there were also participants who were aware of the ICAC but were not aware of individual news stories. These findings suggest that the public may be aware of some of the activities of the ICAC without necessarily attributing them to the organisation.

One primary aim of the survey is determining the public's awareness of the ICAC, its functions and jurisdiction. The findings in this regard were generally similar to those in previous surveys. The data suggested that there are some misconceptions regarding the roles and functions of the ICAC. The most common misconceptions related to people believing that the ICAC has the capability to investigate corruption which is completely independent of the public sector, to knowledge of its powers regarding prosecution, and to thinking that its jurisdiction includes the whole of Australia.

When asked about how they might go about finding out more about the ICAC, the most common response to this question was that they would use the internet. This supports the notion that the role of the internet in the provision of information is increasing. There was also evidence suggesting that younger people utilised electronic means of finding out information about the ICAC more often than older people did.

In conclusion, the present survey indicated that community attitudes towards corruption and the ICAC have remained relatively stable in most respects since 2003. It should be emphasised that the survey reported the views and opinions of individuals within the NSW community, but cannot be used to estimate how closely the public's views correspond to actual levels of corruption or the actions people would take in response to actual situations involving corruption.