

[Home](#) » [World](#) » Article

Buick stops here for corruption

John Garnaut
June 23, 2006

A NEW world corruption index has been crafted by economists examining the 150,000 unpaid parking fines of diplomats in New York.

Kuwait tops the 146-country list, with its nine diplomats averaging 246.2 unpaid fines each in the five years to 2002.

Egypt, Chad, Sudan and Mozambique all averaged more than 100 violations.

Officials from Australia, Japan and Britain, by contrast, did not leave a single unpaid ticket between them.

Authors Raymond Fisman, of Columbia University, and Edward Miguel, of the University of California, say the fines provide a "natural experiment" of how people of different nationalities abuse power when unconstrained by enforceable laws and penalties.

"We find that diplomats from low-corruption countries (e.g. Norway) behave remarkably well even in situations where they can get away with violations, while those from high-corruption countries (e.g. Nigeria) commit many violations, suggesting that they bring the social norms or corruption culture of their home country with them to New York City," their study said.

The authors have adjusted the data for factors like income levels and time spent in New York. Their study, *Cultures of Corruption: Evidence from Diplomatic Parking Tickets*, claims to provide a better measure of ingrained cultural corruption than other surveys.

Officials from corrupt countries accounted for a large number of "egregious" offences, such as double parking and obstructing a fire hydrant.

The study, released yesterday, also found a "strong negative relationship" between infringements

COP THIS

Unpaid parking fines per diplomat in New York 1997-2002*

Kuwait	246.2
Egypt	139.6
Chad	124.3
Sudan	119.1
Bulgaria	117.5
Mozambique	110.7
Pakistan	69.4
Syria	52.7
Zimbabwe	45.6
Indonesia	36.1
Brazil	29.0
China	9.5
France	6.1
PNG	5.5
Russia	2.0
Japan	Nil
UK	Nil
Australia	Nil

*Top 6 countries plus assorted others

SMH GRAPHIC 23.6.06

and affinity for the US.

Abuse of diplomatic immunity has long been an explosive political topic in New York, especially around the United Nations headquarters in midtown Manhattan.

The number of unpaid diplomat fines fell by 80 per cent in the wake of September 11, 2001 - particularly among officials from Muslim countries.

However, it rose again during the invasion of Afghanistan and then plunged from about 1000 a month to less than 100 per month when the mayor, Michael Bloomberg, empowered traffic police to tow away diplomatic vehicles and the US Congress decreed that unpaid fines would be deducted from international aid budgets.

Copyright © 2006. The Sydney Morning Herald.