

Is Bribery Acceptable To People Abroad?

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By Elizabeth Spahn

What do people abroad really think about bribery? Do the people of Mexico, for example, agree with claims that bribery is OK there because it's the local custom?

A peek into the minds of folks living in cultures struggling with corruption can be found in a fascinating opinion survey by Juan Camilo Plata of the **Latin American Public Opinion Project** and published by Vanderbilt University [[pdf here](#)].

“To Bribe or Not To Bribe” shows considerable variation between Latin American cultures. The most bribe-tolerant are Guyana and Haiti, where 32% – 33% of people think “given the way things are, it is sometimes justifiable to pay a bribe.” But that means 67% – 68% apparently do not think bribery is OK even given the current problems.

In Mexico, the poll taken before the **Walmart scandal** shows 22% justifying bribery, which leaves 79% rejecting it. Brazil, Chile and Guatemala have a very low tolerance for bribery, in the 7% range (93% rejecting it).

Bribery by foreigners is less acceptable, according to Plata's research. These survey statistics are for local people bribing local officials. Even bribe justifiers are offended by foreigners bribing their government officials.

Which people are more likely to think domestic bribery is justified? The data show that male, young, urban citizens are more likely to justify bribery.

Americans and Brits claiming that “those foreigners” accept bribery should be measured against this and other data showing that while bribery may be common, it is not acceptable -- not even in Mexico.

The next time an official or intermediary claims bribery is customary and necessary to do business, consider the source. Self serving claims of customary bribe practices should be met with healthy skepticism, not naive acceptance.

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