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LAPOP: Jamaicans feeling more secure as relations with police improve

by Jim Patterson (<http://news.vanderbilt.edu/author/patterjm/>) | Posted on Thursday, Aug. 22, 2013 — 12:11 PM



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Citizens of Jamaica have been feeling progressively less insecure about crime, while their trust in police has increased and their reports of incidences of police soliciting bribes have decreased.

According to the AmericasBarometer Survey by [Vanderbilt University's Latin American Public Opinion Project \(LAPOP\)](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/) (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/>), in 2012 Jamaicans scored an average of 28 points on the survey's crime insecurity measure, which is 4 points lower than 2010 and 10 points lower than 2006.



(<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/political-science/bio/elizabeth-zechmeister>)

Elizabeth Zechmeister
(Vanderbilt)

In an Aug. 18 article (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/18/world/americas/jamaica-fights-to-break-grip-of-violent-past.html?ref=jamaica&r=0>) that noted LAPOP's study, *The New York Times* said support from the United States-supported Caribbean Basin Security Initiative, carried out in partnership with USAID and the government of Jamaica, and reforms to community-based policing, were agents for increased security in the country.

"After more than a decade fighting lawlessness, with limited success, this small island with a reputation for both carefree living and bloodshed has begun to see results," said the *Times*.

LAPOP's analysis supports this conclusion, with their AmericasBarometer survey data indicating a steady decline in reports of police soliciting bribes. In 2006, 7.1 percent of citizens said they had gotten such a request. By 2012, that number was down to 4.4 percent. These data were presented in a [special Topical Brief](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/ITBo10en.pdf) (<http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/insights/ITBo10en.pdf>) released by LAPOP on Aug. 19, written by Elizabeth J. Zechmeister and Mitchell A. Seligson of Vanderbilt, and Anthony A. Harriott and Balford A. Lewis of the University of West Indies-Mona.

"We find that bribe solicitation by police officers has decreased over time exactly in step with the decreases in insecurity," write the *Topical Brief* authors.

Jamaicans' trust in their national police has increased in fits and starts in recent years, with a particularly notable rise in trust between 2010 and 2012. While trust in the police is related to a number of factors, this recent increase in trust might be influenced by a well-publicized raid of a Jamaican neighborhood in 2010, which resulted in 70 deaths and the arrest of drug lord Christopher M. Coke. The *Topical Brief* notes other factors also fuel positive attitudes toward the police in Jamaica, including trust in the courts and the judicial system.



<http://sitemason.vanderbilt.edu/psci/seligson>

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“Our conclusion based on analyses of the Jamaica AmericasBarometer data is that police reform and related efforts in Jamaica have had significant positive effects,” the authors write. “Deepening the reforms in the police and judicial system in Jamaica would go a long way toward continuing to build bonds of trust between the community and the police, and, at the same time, help to decrease violence and increase citizen security.”

LAPOP develops, implements and analyzes the AmericasBarometer public opinion surveys. Since the 1970s, LAPOP has gathered a treasure-trove of databases containing political perspectives from Latin America and the Caribbean. LAPOP data and reports are available to interested researchers at the [LAPOP website](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/)

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LAPOP was founded by its director Seligson, Centennial Professor of Political Science. Zechmeister is associate director of LAPOP and associate professor of political science.

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