

The Pan-American Post

Daily news briefings and analysis on politics, human rights and civil society in Latin America by Geoffrey Ramsey

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Insecurity, Corruption Threaten LatAm Democracies

Two reports published yesterday have focused attention on widespread perceptions of insecurity and corruption in Latin America, a trend with harmful consequences for democratic governance in the region.

First, Transparency International published its [annual Corruption Perceptions Index](#), which compiles nationwide surveys to show how corrupt the public sectors of different countries are believed to be.

This year's CPI contained very few surprises, and [limited changes compared to the 2013 report](#). Venezuela, Haiti, Paraguay, Nicaragua and Honduras remain the most corrupt in the region, according to their citizens' perceptions, while Chile and Uruguay are tied as the least corrupt. Colombia, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil and Peru each received the same or nearly the same (the last three saw one-point increases) scores as the previous year, though their comparative rankings saw no major shifts.

As Transparency International's Americas Director Alejandro Salas [told the Associated Press](#), the fact that there were no major shifts in CPI in the region this year is not a positive sign. For Salas, this was "another year of not seeing further progress, of seeing no improvements for the population." He pointed to the recent incidents in Mexico (see [Peña Nieto's "Casa Blanca"](#)) and Brazil (the [growing Petrobras scandal](#)) as reminders that if the emerging powers in the region hope to establish themselves as such, they need to set examples on accountability.

The second major report published yesterday is the release of the [Latin American Public Opinion Project's \(LAPOP\) biennial AmericasBarometer survey \(.pdf\)](#), covering attitudes towards democracy in 28 countries across the region. Like Transparency International, LAPOP found evidence of widespread cynicism regarding the accountability of regional governments, with a minimum of 68 percent of respondents in every country saying that corruption is somewhat or very common among officials.

Compared to previous reports, this year's AmericasBarometer places special emphasis on insecurity and its impact on citizens' faith in institutions. In general, things do not look good on this front.

According to the LAPOP's data, fear of crime has increased across the region. The average rate of respondents who view their neighborhoods as insecure is at one of its highest points on record, and 61.4 percent say that the level of violence where they live is the same or higher than it was a year ago.

The survey also showed widespread lack of faith in law enforcement and judicial systems, with half of respondents expressing dissatisfaction with their police. As [El Pais](#) reports, the countries with the worst public perception of police were Bolivia, Venezuela, Peru, Haiti and Mexico, in that order. Additionally, LAPOP found that the region's average faith in courts has fallen to its lowest level in ten years. The level of perceived impunity is highest in Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia, Peru and Mexico.

In addition to its comparative regional report, LAPOP released its survey data for all of the sample countries, which is available [free of charge on its website](#).

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News Briefs

- In its latest response to the reports of lawlessness and violence in rural areas in the country, the Mexican government has announced that federal forces will be **assuming security duties in 32 municipalities** across Guerrero, Mexico State and Michoacan. According to **Milenio**, the resort city of Acapulco will receive 500 members of the country's newly-launched gendarmerie force.
- Mexican NGO Fundar has released a new **report on policing and human rights abuses committed by security forces** in the country, based on more than 240 interviews in Guerrero. As **Animal Politico** notes, the report found evidence of systematic abuses and an overall reactive approach to insecurity stemming from a chronic lack of crime prevention efforts. To remedy the situation, the group calls for greater emphasis on POLICE professionalization, protecting vulnerable groups, and reforms to make every level of government more responsive to citizens' input.
- The **WSJ** has an **update on Mexican President Peña Nieto's "Casa Blanca" scandal**, noting that the opposition is calling for investigations into his ties to a luxury home owned by a private contractor that has won lucrative contracts. As the paper notes, most attention has been focused on Peña Nieto's relationship with the company prior to assuming the presidency, but public records show the firm has continued to receive high-profile contracts under the current administration. Meanwhile, **Aristegui Noticias** reports that Peña Nieto made use of another property belonging to the same company in 2012 when he was president-elect.
- **InSight Crime** has a useful analysis of another LAPOP report with important ramifications for security in the Americas: one of the first **quantitative assessments of USAID's crime prevention work in Central America**. By measuring survey responses in 127 crime-plagued neighborhoods in Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala and Panama from 2010 to 2014, LAPOP was able to identify a significant reduction in murders, extortion and other crimes in areas that benefitted from USAID's work. As Insight Crime notes, the report illustrates the potential promise of community crime prevention efforts, though doubts about the sustainability of these programs remain.
- Yesterday, the Colombian government and FARC negotiating teams released a statement announcing that the two would **resume peace talks on December 10**. As **El Tiempo** reports, the parties also agreed to create a mediation mechanism involving the guarantor countries of Norway and Cuba in order to resolve any unexpected conflicts in the future.
- **El Universal** reports that Venezuelan opposition figure Maria Corina Machado has formally been accused of involvement in an alleged plot to kill President Nicolas Maduro. Prosecutors met with Machado yesterday to inform her of the conspiracy charges she faces, which carry a maximum potential prison sentence of 16 years. The AP notes that U.S. Senator Marco Rubio, one of the strongest supporters of sanctioning Venezuela, called the case a "travesty." Assistant Secretary of State for Western Hemisphere Affairs Roberta Jacobson also reacted to the charges yesterday, **issuing a statement** saying that the administration was "deeply concerned by what appears to be the Venezuelan government's continuing effort to intimidate its political opponents." More in today's U.S. press from the **New York Times** and **Wall Street Journal**.
- Just as environmental negotiators are meeting in Peru for UN climate talks, a recent report by a Brazilian climate scientist is causing a stir. According to a study by Antonio Donato Nobre of the Center for Earth System Science, deforestation in the Amazon could explain a decrease in precipitation in areas downwind of the rainforest, making it a potential contributor to the current record drought in São Paulo, as **El Pais** and **Reuters** report.
- After two weeks of debate, Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff scored a narrow victory last night in the passage of a bill that will allow her administration to get around its budget target for the year, **O Globo** and **Reuters** report.
- The White House marked the five-year anniversary of the imprisonment of USAID contractor Alan Gross yesterday with Press Secretary Josh Earnest **calling for his release on humanitarian grounds**, a move the official said would "remove an impediment to more constructive relations between the United

States and Cuba."

- The AP reports on a dictatorship-era sexual violence trial moving forward in Chile, involving four women who say they were raped after being detained by military officials. The four testified before a judge this week, and are seeking to pressure the Chilean government to classify the rape of political prisoners and torture as political crimes, which would allow for harsher sentencing.