

December 2020 | Claire Q. Evans

# Spotlight on Perceptions of Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean

*People in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region think corruption among public officials is widespread, but these perceptions are improving*

## In most countries, more than two-thirds believe corruption is widespread

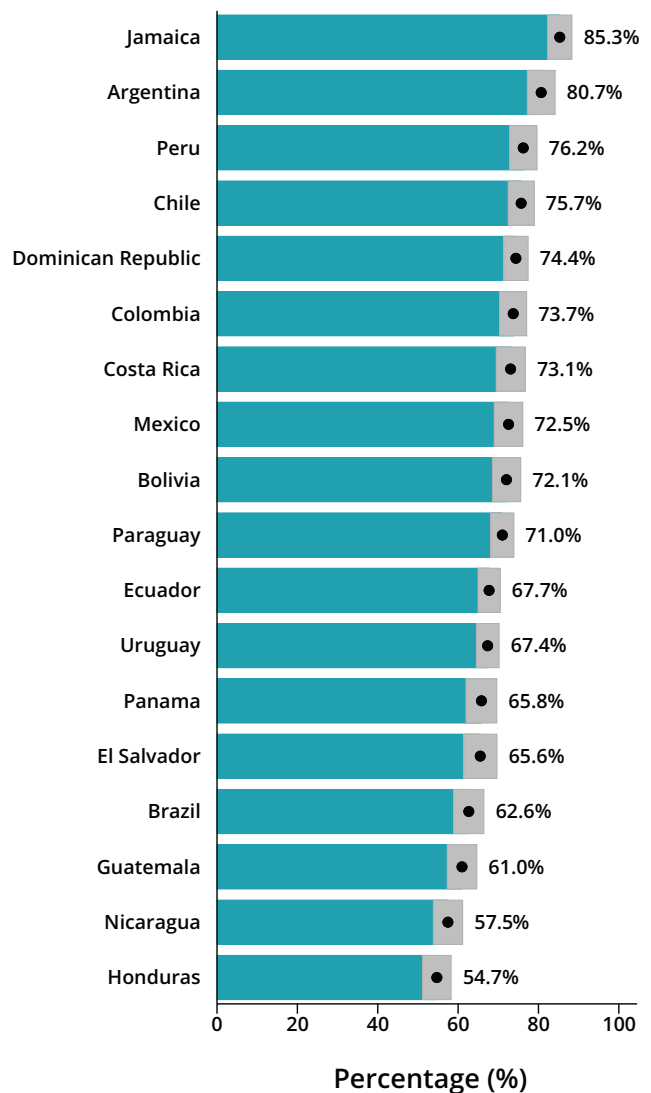
Since 2004, LAPOP’s AmericasBarometer has measured people’s perceptions of corruption among public officials by asking the following question:

**EXC7. Taking into account your own experience or what you have heard, corruption among public officials is...very widespread, somewhat widespread, not very widespread, or not widespread at all?**

In the 2018/19 round, this question was included on surveys in 18 LAC countries. Here we code responses into a dichotomous variable so that we can estimate the percentage of people who find corruption to be widespread rather than less common. Those who responded that corruption was “very widespread” or “somewhat widespread” are combined to capture those perceiving a high prevalence of corruption, while the “not very widespread” and “not widespread at all” responses are combined to capture the belief that corruption is less common.

The country with the highest percentage of people who believe that corruption is widespread among officials in 2018/19 is Jamaica. More than 85% of Jamaicans believe that corruption is very or somewhat widespread. In Argentina, perceptions are also negative, with four in five individuals (80.7%) indicating that corruption is widespread among the country’s officials. Perceptions of corruption among officials are lowest in the Central American countries of Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras. However, even in these countries the majority report the belief that corruption is widespread.

**Corruption is Widespread Among Public Officials, 2018/19**

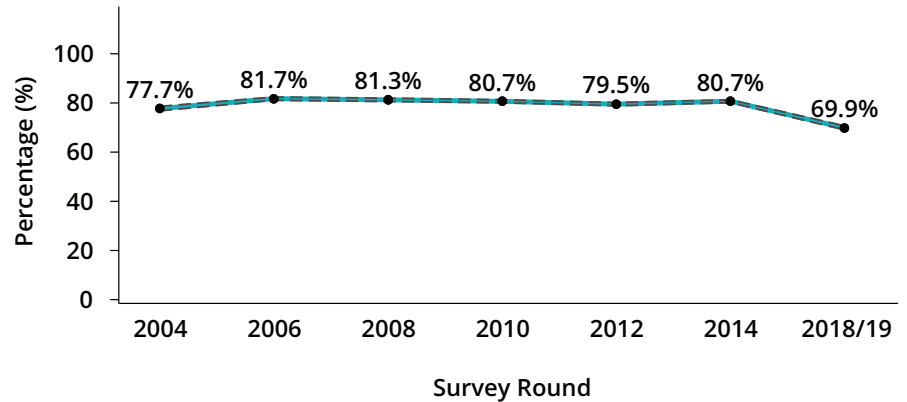


95% Confidence Interval (with Design-Effects)

## Perceptions of corruption remain high, but have improved in recent years

In the average LAC region country, a majority of adults in 2018/19 believes corruption to be widespread among officials (69.9%). Importantly, there was significant improvement in these perceptions in recent years. The regional average had previously hovered around 80%. The 2018/19 survey captured a more than a 10-point drop in the proportion of people who thought corruption was widespread.<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, this improvement in perceptions of corruption does not correlate with changes in political efficacy, trust in political institutions, or corruption victimization.<sup>2</sup>

### Corruption is Widespread Among Public Officials in the LAC Region, 2018/19



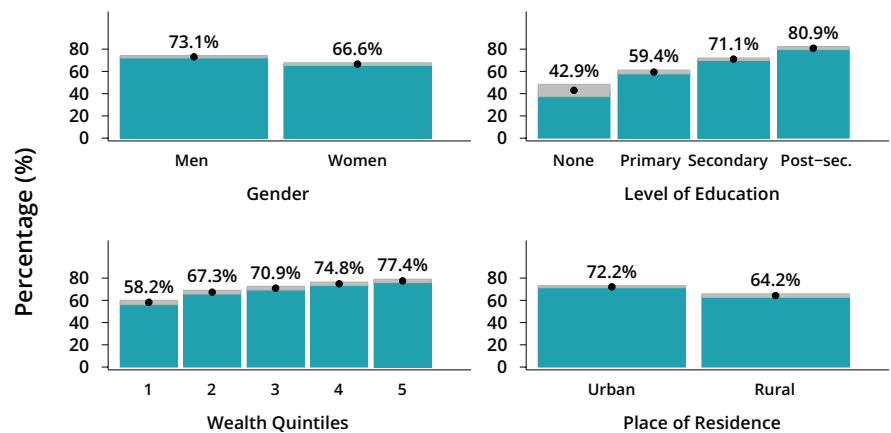
--- 95% Confidence Interval (with Design-Effects)

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2004–2018/19; GM1.0

## Perceptions of corruption are worse among those who are male, wealthy, educated, and urban residents

Who perceives corruption to be widespread in the LAC countries? A greater percentage of men perceive widespread corruption than women, as do urban residents relative to those who live in rural areas. As one's wealth increases, so do perceptions of corruption among officials. A considerably larger proportion of people in the wealthiest quintile see corruption as widespread (77.4%), while in the lowest wealth quintile only 58.2% of people perceive it as widespread. Similarly, education is associated with increased perceptions of corruption, with the percentage of people who believe it is widespread increasing at each level of education.

### Corruption is Widespread Among Public Officials in the LAC Region, 2018/19



■ 95% Confidence Interval (with Design-Effects)

Source: © AmericasBarometer, LAPOP, 2018/19; GM1.0

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 Consult the data and our reports at  
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As a charter member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative, the LAPOP Lab is committed to routine disclosure of our data collection and reporting processes. More information about the AmericasBarometer sample designs can be found at [www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop/core-surveys.php)

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<sup>1</sup> In the 2018/19 round, EXC7 was only asked of half the sample in every country included in Figure 1 as part of an experiment on question wording. Paraguay is the only country in the 2018/19 round where all respondents were asked EXC7.

<sup>2</sup> There are no changes in the questionnaire design across survey waves that could account for change from 2014 to 2018/19.