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.
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.1 Interestingly, this improvement in perceptions of corruption does not correlate with changes in political efficacy, trust in political institutions, or corruption victimization.2

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.

Interested in knowing more about the LAPOP Lab’s AmericasBarometer study? Consult the data and our reports at www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop.

Claire Q. Evans received her PhD in Political Science at Vanderbilt University and was a LAPOP affiliated researcher. She is now a research coordinator working on community and public health at the Peabody School of Education at Vanderbilt University.

Series Editors: Sebastián C. Larrea, Mariana Rodríguez, Valerie Schweizer, and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister

---

1 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.

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