Spotlight on Police Corruption in Latin America and the Caribbean

Corruption victimization by police has increased since the 2018/19 survey round in the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region

Corruption victimization by police varies greatly throughout the LAC region

Since 2004, LAPOP’s AmericasBarometer has measured corruption victimization by police by asking the following question: **EXC2. Has a police officer asked you for a bribe in the last twelve months?** In the 2021 survey round, this question was included on surveys conducted in 19 LAC countries. Here we show the percentage of respondents that answered “yes” to this question.

Corruption victimization by police is most prevalent in Mexico and Bolivia where about a quarter of respondents answered that a police officer had asked them for a bribe in the last twelve months (25.2% and 22.8%, respectively). In comparison, respondents in Chile (1.3%) and Uruguay (2.2%) had the lowest levels of corruption victimization by police in the past twelve months.
Since 2004, the rate of corruption victimization by police has slowly increased

The lowest recorded rate of corruption victimization by police was in 2004 when 8.5% of respondents in the LAC region reported this type of experience. The largest increase occurred in the following round, when 10.0% reported this type of incident. In the 2016/17 round, the percentage of respondents who were asked for a bribe by police reached its highest level at 11.7%. In 2021, the second highest level of corruption victimization by police was reported at 11.5%.

Corruption victimization by police is most common among men, those with at least some post-secondary education, those between 18-35 years of age, and those in the highest wealth group

Who is most likely to be asked for a bribe by a police officer? In the LAC region, the percentage of men (15.8%) that were asked for a bribe is more than double that of women (7.4%). Those with at least some post-secondary education are more likely to be asked for a bribe by a police officer than those with less education. Across age groups, those in the two youngest cohorts 18-25 and 26-35 (13.5% and 14.7%, respectively), are more likely to be asked for a bribe than older age groups. Finally, individuals with the highest level of wealth are more likely than all other wealth groups to be asked for a bribe by a police officer in the LAC region.²

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1 In order to avoid excluding non-binary respondents from the analysis, we recode the gender variable to include non-binary respondents with women. In this survey in the LAC region, 0.28% of respondents identified as a gender other than man or woman.

2 The variable for place of residence (ur1new) has been omitted for this round of Spotlight Reports due to a change in survey mode for the 2021 round of the AmericasBarometer.

As a charter member of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Transparency Initiative, 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

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