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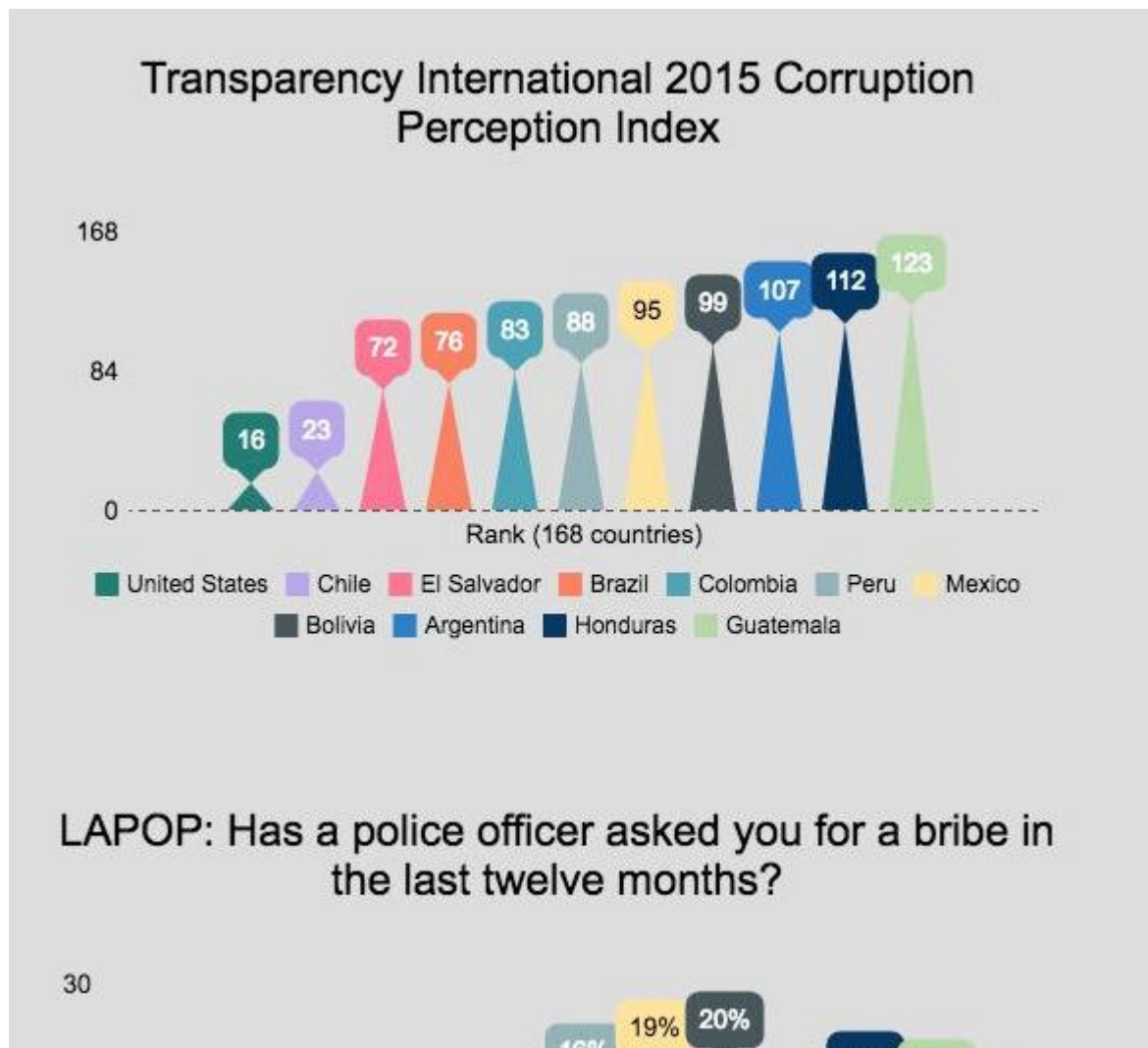
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Corruption perceptions in the Americas

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Corruption has been always a topic of discussion in the Americas. With a few exceptions in the region, such as the United States and Chile, most of the countries perform poorly in surveys or rankings to measure corruption.

Nowadays, citizens' perceptions can be key when shaping the national discussion or the country's agenda. However, when talking about corruption, often the measurements are of how businesses, media and the international community perceive corruption. But there's also how corruption affects people in their day-to-day lives. Should we expect perceptions of businessmen, journalists and experts to match the general public's experiences? To find out, we used two different surveys on

corruption, Transparency International and the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP).

Every year Transparency International, an NGO, publishes its [Corruption Perception Index \(CPI\)](#). The CPI focuses on the perceptions of country experts and businesspeople on public sector corruption in countries around the world. In 2015 the CPI ranked 168 nations, on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean). The average global score was 43, while the regional average for the Americas was 40 (including the U.S. and Canada). 81 percent of all of the countries in the Americas score below 50.

Vanderbilt University's [LAPOP](#) also conducts its own measurement of corruption within its bi-annual survey of public opinion in the Americas. In two cases, it asks whether people were asked for bribes from police officers and how often they were asked for bribes from government employees in the past year.

The two studies do not always result in the same results. Guatemala, with a score of only 28 in the CPI, ranked 123 among the 168 countries. However, when LAPOP asked about bribes, only 4 percent admitted to paying a bribe to a government employee, and 14 percent to a police officer. Similarly, Argentina, with a score of 32, was ranked 107 in the CPI, yet when the general public was surveyed only 4 percent admitted to being asked for a bribe to a government employee and a 7 percent to a police officer.

In contrast, Mexico scored 35 and ranked 95—fairly well—in the 2015 CPI, though they have the highest percentages on bribery in the region: 19 percent of citizens report being asked for a bribe to police officers and 9 percent to government employees. The same was the case with Bolivia. The country scored 34 in the CPI, with a rank of 99, but when Bolivians

were asked by LAPOP, 20 percent confirmed they had been asked for a bribe by a police officer and 8 percent by a government employee.

The question is, why does the perception of corruption in some countries line up with the actual occurrence of bribes, while in others the perception is high, yet the actual incidence of bribes is much lower? Perhaps the explanation is that the CPI implicitly focuses on high-level corruption scandals that hit the headlines and affect businesses, such as the Argentine official recently trying to [hide \\$8 million in a convent](#) instead of the petty corruption affecting the citizens' day-to-day lives.



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