



GLOBAL CORRUPTION REPORT 2005

Special Focus

**Corruption in Construction
and Post-conflict Reconstruction**

Foreword by Francis Fukuyama



23 The Latin American Public Opinion Project: corruption victimisation, 2004

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The *Global Corruption Report 2004* contained a chapter reporting on surveys measuring corruption victimisation in several Latin American countries. In 2004 those surveys were repeated in nine countries in the region and were carried out by the Latin American Public Opinion Project, formerly of the University of Pittsburgh and now of Vanderbilt University, with funding from the United States Agency for International Development. In this report on the surveys, the focus is on corruption victimisation in the workplace and among users of four popular services: health, the courts, schools and local government. The studies were all conducted using face-to-face interviews, with nationally representative samples of about 1,500 respondents in each country except Ecuador, where 3,000 people were interviewed.²

For this group of 15,000 Latin Americans, it was disappointing to see that corruption victimisation was greatest in the school system, among respondents who had children in school during the year covered by the survey (see Figure 23.1).³ One likes to think of school systems as largely immune from the more sordid aspects of life that adults

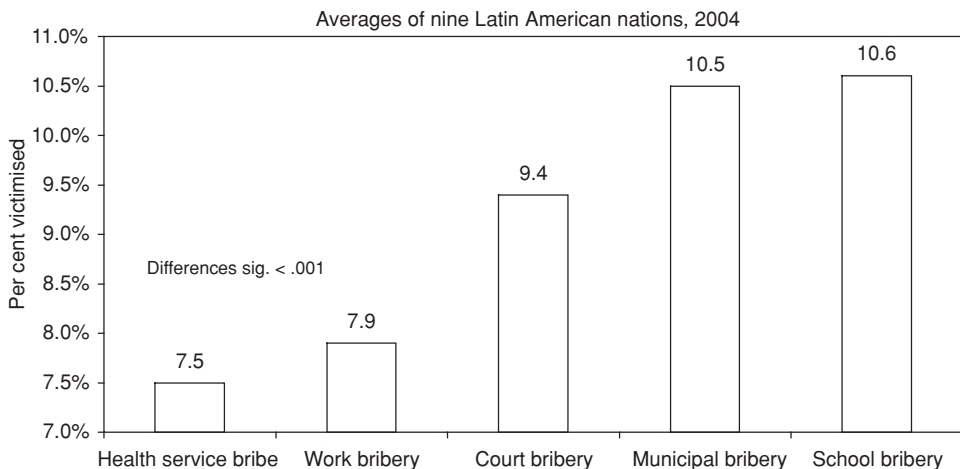


Figure 23.1: Reported bribery victimisation at work and among service users

Source: Latin American Public Opinion Project, Vanderbilt University.

must face, but in Latin America this is clearly not the case. In fact, since schools are a major transmission mechanism of cultural values, the youth of these countries are being socialised into systems in which corruption is endemic.

These overall results hide sharp differences among the countries in the sample. Table 23.1 shows that whereas in Colombia ‘only’ one in 20 parents who had children in school reported paying bribes in the year prior to the study, nearly one in four parents in Ecuador faced this problem in their schools. School-related corruption is also a serious problem for parents in other countries in the region, especially Mexico and Honduras.

Table 23.1: Percentage of corruption victims among users of services, by country^a

	School system	Local government	Courts
Colombia	5.5	5.3	5.1
Costa Rica	8.6	5.6	2.7
Ecuador	23.8	15.0	20.5
El Salvador	7.3	5.3	4.0
Guatemala	8.7	8.2	5.0
Honduras	11.3	10.2	6.6
Mexico	12.8	20.8	13.5
Nicaragua	9.5	12.9	15.5
Panama	6.7	9.3	6.5

a. Differences sig. < .001.

Corruption victimisation among those who carried out some transaction with local municipal governments (for example, asking for a permit) was commonplace, as shown in Table 23.1. In Mexico, 20.8 per cent of users of local government services reported having to pay a bribe, compared to Colombia, Guatemala and Costa Rica where the victimisation rate was only one-quarter as high.

Although the court system is frequently discussed as an important venue of corrupt practices, our data show that, on average, corruption is less frequent there than among other public services. In Costa Rica, for example, such corruption is rather uncommon (only 2.7 per cent of court users). In contrast, in its neighbour to the north, Nicaragua, court-based corruption is over five times more common.

What stands out in this analysis is not only the frequency of corruption victimisation among users of public services, but the wide variation among the countries studied and the variation among distinct venues for corrupt practices. Mexico and Ecuador stand apart from the other countries as being far more subject to corruption than the others, while overall the school system and local government are especially vulnerable to the penetration of corrupt practices. These results should help target public policy anti-corruption efforts in these countries, demonstrating where the problems are more serious and where the problem is more under control.

Notes

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2. Since the Ecuador sample is twice as large as the others, the responses for this country are weighted by .5 in order not to distort the overall means for the nine-country sample.
3. While the overall results are statistically significant for the combined sample, the differences among the forms of corruption measured are between health service bribes and work bribery on the one hand, and the remaining three categories on the other. Approximately half of the respondents in each of the countries had experience with corruption in the health services, work and schools, whereas about one-third had such experiences with municipal governments and an average of about 15 per cent in the courts. The lower frequency of corruption victimisation in these last two categories widens the confidence interval of the estimates compared to the other categories.