

Corruption Perceptions Index 2015 Americas: How 2015 was a warning to the corrupt

Expert analysis by Alejandro Salas, Director for the Americas

In Brief

We witnessed two remarkable trends in the Americas in 2015: the uncovering of grand corruption networks and the mass mobilisation of citizens against corruption. It's no surprise that Brazil – which faced its [largest-ever corruption scandal around Petrobras](#) – is this year's biggest index decliner in the Americas, yet there and elsewhere we saw corruption investigations against people who looked untouchable only 12 months ago. The challenge now is to tackle the underlying causes. The citizens who took to the streets demanded an end to corruption for good – only serious institutional reform will make that happen.

The good

The fight against impunity may be far from over, but 2015 sent a strong warning to the corrupt. As three members of [Honduras's elite Rosenthal clan](#) were charged with money laundering and [Guatemala's president](#) was jailed for reportedly taking bribes, even the most powerful figures found they could no longer rely on their cash and connections to protect them. Scores may not have improved dramatically, but it's worth remembering that marginal upward movement or stagnation can also be the result of corruption becoming more visible and talked about.

The bad

But arrests aren't enough. However welcome, prosecuting existing politicians won't stop new corrupt individuals getting rich at the expense of citizens. Many countries low down the index have ample natural resources – take Argentina, Mexico or oil-rich Venezuela, the region's lowest scorer – yet long-standing corruption has led to a desperate lack of investment in security, education and health. Until these weaknesses are addressed, corruption will continue to be the norm and citizens' quality of life will not improve.

What needs to happen

Governments need to ensure real and systemic reform – starting with freeing judiciaries from political influence and creating better regional cooperation between law enforcement to stop the corrupt hiding in different jurisdictions. Citizens, meanwhile, should continue their calls for change. In 2015 we saw ever more people connect the poor services they receive with the illicit enrichment of a few corrupt individuals. These people need to keep up their pressure on leaders, and demand the accountable, well-functioning institutions they deserve.

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Media contacts:

Chris Sanders

T: +49 30 34 38 20 666

E: press@transparency.org

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