



Corruption Rampant From U.S. to Venezuela, Study Finds

By: Andrew O'Reilly – July 10, 2013

From Washington D.C. to Caracas, people throughout the Americas feel that corruption in sectors of society is on the rise, according to a survey from a watchdog group.

Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer 2013 found that 58 percent of people in the Americas believe that corruption has gotten worse the last two years throughout the region, with political parties, law enforcement and judicial systems all ranking among the least trustworthy areas.

In the United States, mistrust and feelings of rampant corruption were mostly placed on the country's political parties and the legislative system.

A particularly harsh presidential race last year, the powerful emergence of the so-called Super PACS and a number of recent scandals surrounding the administration of President Barack Obama have been cited as the main reasons that 76 percent of those polled found political parties corrupt. About 61 percent said they believed there is rampant corruption in Congress and the White House.

"There has been a lot of issues out there in the news that cast a bad light on political parties and the country's legislature," Alejandro Salas, Transparency International's regional director for the Americas, told Fox News Latino. "While maybe corruption hasn't gotten any higher in the U.S., the stories emerging now have made this perception appear higher."

Salas added that while the U.S. touts itself internationally as a bastion for democracy, these numbers and the recent scandals have challenged that assertion.

"The U.S. is a paradox," he said. "It's trying to find out what its democracy means."

While the U.S. is struggling with perceptions of corruption in its political sphere, the country's southern neighbor is dealing with alleged rampant corruption within its police forces.

About 90 percent of Mexicans surveyed said that there was an extreme degree of corruption in law enforcement and 80 percent in its judicial system. Even more shocking, about 61 percent of Mexicans said they had been fleeced for a bribe when they contacted the police and 55 percent when they got in touch with the judiciary.

Much attention has recently been put on the violence related to Mexico's ongoing drug war and the ties between military and police with drug cartels. This level of corruption, however, goes

back decades in Mexico and has become an ingrained part of the law enforcement and judicial system in the country, Salas said.

“It’s cultural because of decades that it has been like that and that’s just the way it works,” he added.

But rampant corruption seems to be a more recent problem in Venezuela. Citizens seem to be concerned over the perceived corruption among the country’s public officials and civil servants – in large part to the country’s consolidation of power under former President Hugo Chávez and current leader Nicolás Maduro.

“The intensity of corruption in Chávez’s Venezuela has had a strong political and social component, in addition to the purely financial,” wrote Gustavo Coronel of the Cato Institute.

“The conversion of democratic Venezuela into a rogue state has been based in systematic violations of the constitution and the laws and in the progressive elimination of administrative and institutional checks and balances.”

Salas reiterated this sentiment, saying that under Maduro the same subsystem of cronyism and corruption has been able to be sustained.

“It’s mostly weakness of the institution,” he said. “When the leader is a demanding force, all the other public offices don’t function the way they’re supposed to.”

The Transparency International survey questioned 114,000 respondents from 107 countries.