

Chile's Urban Poor Perceive Widespread Corruption in Government

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Business leaders have given Chile a relatively clean bill of health on corruption. But poorer Chileans may disagree. A survey conducted in the capital of Santiago shows that nine out of ten of the urban poor (87%) think corruption permeates all levels of government.

The School of Administration and Economics at Santiago's [Universidad Católica Silva Henríquez](#) found in a study released Aug. 8, 2006, that the poor perceived Congress and the Supreme Court as the most corrupt institutions. The low-income respondents thought that fire departments, universities and high schools were the least corrupt.

Respondents were also pessimistic about the prospects for successfully combating corruption. Sixty-one percent agreed that "very little can be done to put a stop to corruption." That is an increase from similar polls taken in 2003 and 2004 when about half (53-54 percent) agreed with the statement. Moreover, most of those surveyed think the problem is getting worse. Seven out of ten (73%) said that corruption was "more serious than a year ago."

The study involved face-to-face interviews conducted in December 2005 with 354 residents of the poorest neighborhoods in Santiago, including Cerrillos, Cerro Navia, Conchalí, Puente Alto, Renca, San Bernardo, and San Ramón. The results have a 4.1 percent margin of error.

Lead investigator Marcelo Yáñez Pérez said in a press release that the results showed that the poor did not see any benefits from efforts by the Chilean government in recent years to combat corruption and promote greater transparency.

"In the three years that this study has been done," he said, "the negative perception of the poor people of Santiago has been almost unchanged."

In contrast, business people and experts have relatively positive perceptions of Chile. According to an index published by [Transparency International](#), a research network that monitors corruption around the world, Chile is Latin America's least corrupt country. Chile had a 2005 "corruption perception index" or CPI of 7.3, the same as Japan. The CPI is calculated from data collected in surveys of business leaders and country experts.