



World Justice  
Project

# The Rule of Law in Panama

Key Findings from the General  
Population Poll 2022

# Acknowledgements

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# ABOUT THIS REPORT

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6 Executive Findings

# ABOUT THIS REPORT

**EFFECTIVE RULE OF LAW** reduces corruption, combats poverty and disease, and protects people from injustices large and small. Strengthening the rule of law is an important objective for governments, donors, and civil society organizations around the world. To be effective, rule of law development requires clarity about the fundamental features that define the rule of law, as well as an adequate basis for its evaluation and measurement.

*The Rule of Law in Panama: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2022* presents question-level data drawn from the General Population Poll (GPP), an original data source designed and collected by the World Justice Project. To provide a more in-depth view of trends in perceptions of rule of law in Panama, this report also presents select findings over time and compared to Panama's regional peers within the Central American subregion of Latin America and the Caribbean.

The GPP was conducted in December 2022 through face-to-face interviews to a nationally representative sample of 2,023 Panamanian households. This poll was designed to capture data on the experiences and perceptions of ordinary people regarding a variety of themes related to the rule of law.

*This report represents the voices of people in Panama and their experiences with the rule of law in their country.*

The data derived from the General Population Poll is presented in this report as thematic briefs, each one highlighting a different dimension of the rule of law from the perspective of Panamanians. These thematic briefs focus on the current rule of law ecosystem in Panama while simultaneously illuminating changes over time and comparisons across the following peer countries in the Central American region: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. Each section touches upon perceptions of and attitudes towards the following topics: accountability, authoritarianism, fundamental freedoms, corruption, bribery victimization, trust in institutions, the criminal justice system and its actors, police performance, crime victimization, support for victims of crime, security, access to justice, and migration.

# EXECUTIVE FINDINGS

*The Rule of Law in Panama: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2022* provides a comprehensive overview of how citizens perceive and experience the rule of law in Panama alongside comparative findings across the Central American region. The findings in this report indicate some positive trends in the general public's perspective on the rule of law in Panama, including low perceptions of authoritarian behavior and low rates of crime victimization. Despite these positive developments, however, these findings highlight the fact that many challenges—including declining levels of trust in institutions, worsening perceptions of personal safety, and weakened confidence in criminal justice system performance—persist. At the regional level, prominent trends include deteriorating perceptions of fundamental freedoms, low levels of trust in institutions, and weakened confidence in criminal justice system performance.

## SECTION 1

### Authoritarianism, Fundamental Freedoms, and Accountability

#### 1. Authoritarianism

On average, roughly half of all respondents in Central America agreed that top government officials engage in authoritarian behavior. Among respondents in Central America, on average, Guatemalans most often felt that top government officials engage in authoritarian behavior and Panamanians least often felt that top government officials engage in authoritarian behavior.

- When asked about authoritarian tendencies in Panama, respondents most often felt that top government officials **attack or attempt to discredit the media and civil society organizations that criticize them** (54%), **resort to misinformation to shape public opinion in their favor** (49%), and **attack or attempt to discredit opposition parties** (49%).
- Compared to their regional counterparts, respondents in Panama least often felt that top government officials  **censor opinions from opposition groups** (38%),  **censor information that comes from abroad** (38%), and engage in any authoritarian tactic under the category “**Attacks on the Judiciary.**”

#### 2. Fundamental Freedoms

On average, fewer respondents believe that their freedoms of expression, political participation, election, and religion are guaranteed in Belize, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Panama compared to compared to the last year of data collection. In contrast, the average percentage of respondents who believe that these freedoms are guaranteed increased in Costa Rica, El Salvador, and Honduras. Throughout the region, Costa Ricans, on average, most often felt that fundamental freedoms are guaranteed by the state, while Nicaraguans least often felt the same.

- When asked about respect for fundamental freedoms in Panama, respondents had more favorable views on freedom of religion, with 87% of respondents agreeing that **religious minorities can observe their holy days**. Conversely, Panamanians had less favorable views on electoral freedoms, with 40% of respondents agreeing that **local government officials are elected through a clean process**.
- Between 2021 and 2022, Panama's most significant trends in public opinions on freedoms include declines in the perceptions that **local government officials are elected through a clean process** (down 11 percentage points) and **people can vote freely without feeling harassed or pressured** (down 8 percentage points).

#### 3. Accountability

Perceptions of accountability in Central America are relatively positive compared to in the rest of Latin America. However, less than half of all respondents in Central American countries believe that high-ranking officials would be held accountable for breaking the law (with the exception of El Salvador, where 51% of respondents believe this to be the case). Respondents in Belize had the most negative perceptions of accountability when compared against regional peers in Central America (only 22% of respondents believe that high-ranking government officials would be held accountable for breaking the law).

- Two-fifths (40%) of Panamanians believe that high-ranking government officials would be held accountable for breaking the law.

## SECTION 2

### Corruption and Trust

#### 4. Corruption

Public views on the pervasiveness of corruption within the legislature, law enforcement, the executive branch, and the judiciary improved, on average, in El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Panama, whereas overall perceptions of corruption deteriorated in Belize, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. Compared to Central American peer countries, El Salvador saw the largest decreases in the percentage of respondents who believe that some or all of the actors across all of these institutions are involved in corrupt practices, while Nicaragua saw the largest increases in the percentage of respondents who believe the same. On average, more Nicaraguans reported perceptions of corruption across all actors than their regional peers in Central America, while Salvadorans reported the same least frequently.

- Perceptions of corruption in Panama improved most for **prosecutors**, with 35% of respondents believing that most or all prosecutors engage in corrupt practices in 2022, compared to 42% in 2021.
- **Members of political parties** and the **National Assembly** are considered the most corrupt actors in Panama. Approximately 69% of respondents believe that most or all members of Panamanian political parties and the legislature are involved in corrupt practices.
- **Teachers in public schools** are considered the least corrupt actors in Panama, with 20% of respondents reporting that they believe most or all teachers are involved in corrupt practices.

#### 5. Bribery Victimization

On average, Central American respondents reported paying a bribe most often in Nicaragua and least often in Costa Rica. Throughout the region, respondents most frequently had to pay a bribe when requesting a government permit and least often when using public health services, on average.

#### 6. Trust

Respondents in Central America, on average, trust people living in their community more than any other public actor and trust national government officers the least. On average, respondents in Honduras least often reported having some or a lot of trust across all institutions. In contrast, respondents in El Salvador reported the highest overall levels of trust.

- Levels of trust in Panama declined across almost every institution between 2021 and 2022. Panamanians only reported higher levels of trust in people living in their community (51% of respondents in 2022 compared to 50% in 2021).
- Trust in **local government officers** worsened the most between 2021 and 2022, with a decrease of 11 percentage points.
- In 2022, respondents in Panama most often reported having some or a lot of trust in **people living in their community** (51%) and least often reported having some or a lot of trust in **national government officers** (25%).

## SECTION 3

### Security and Criminal Justice

#### 7. Crime Victimization

On average, roughly one-quarter (27%) of all respondents surveyed in Central America reported experiencing a crime in the last 12 months. On average, less than half (44%) of those respondents reported their crime experience to an authority.

- Nearly one-fifth (19%) of Panamanians reported experiencing a crime in the last 12 months, a figure below the regional average (27%).
- More than half (53%) of Panamanian respondents who were victims of a crime did not report the crime to an authority, with those respondents most often citing the belief that reporting would not help as their reason for not reporting (33%).

## 8. Security

**More than half of all Central American respondents feel safe or very safe when walking in their neighborhood at night.** Perceptions of safety improved or remained the same in 5 out of 7 Central American countries between 2022 and the last year of data collection, and declined only in Panama and Nicaragua (down 5 and 8 percentage points, respectively). Compared to respondents in regional peer countries, Salvadorans most often reported feeling safe in their neighborhood at night (89%), while slightly more than half of Costa Ricans, Nicaraguans, and Panamanians (52%) reported the same.

- In Panama, just over half (52%) of all respondents reported feeling safe walking in their neighborhood at night in 2022, marking a decline of 5 percentage points since 2021.
- Panamanian women, Panamanians who live in an urban area, Panamanians who had previously been a victim of a crime, Panamanians who do not have a high school diploma, and Panamanians who are financially insecure were less likely to feel safe walking in their neighborhood at night than respondents with other sociodemographic characteristics.

## 9. Criminal Justice

**Throughout Central America, respondents are most confident that the criminal justice system safeguards the presumption of innocence and least confident that the criminal justice system ensures timeliness, on average.** Respondents in El Salvador reported the highest levels of confidence in the criminal justice system overall, while respondents in Honduras reported the lowest levels of confidence. Average perceptions of the criminal justice system's overall performance deteriorated in 4 out of 6 Central American countries, while respondents in Costa Rica and El Salvador expressed more positive views on every function between 2022 and the last cycle of data collection.

- Panamanians were most confident that the criminal justice system **safeguards the presumption of innocence of defendants** (47%), **ensures equal treatment of the accused** (46%), and **ensures widespread access** (46%). Panamanians were least confident that the criminal justice system **ensures timeliness** (34%) and **ensures uniform quality of service** (41%).
- Perceptions of adherence to **equal treatment of victims and the accused** in the Panamanian criminal justice system worsened the most between 2021 and 2022, with declines of 9 and 7 percentage points, respectively.

## 10. Police Performance

**When asked about their impressions of police performance, respondents in Central America had the most negative views on accountability and due process and the most positive views on public service and crime control, on average.**

- When asked about their impressions of police performance, respondents in Panama were most confident that:
  - Police treat all people with respect (72%).
  - Police are available to help when needed (66%).
  - Police are not involved in corrupt practices (63%).
- Respondents in Panama were least confident that:
  - Police do not use excessive force (39%).
  - Police do not serve the interests of politicians (41%).
  - Police are held accountable for seeking bribes (44%).
  - Police are held accountable for violating laws (44%).
- In Panama, respondents most often indicated that suspects with tattoos and younger suspects would most likely be at a disadvantage in a criminal investigation.

## 11. Victim Support

**In almost every country surveyed in Central America, less than half of all respondents, on average, believed that victims of crime receive adequate support and protection, with the exception of El Salvador.** Respondents in El Salvador reported the most confidence in victim support practices overall, while respondents in Honduras reported the least confidence in the victim support practices overall.

- Panamanians were most often confident that crime victims **are addressed by the police using accessible language** (50%) and **receive a clear explanation of the crime reporting process** (49%).
- Panamanians were least often confident that crime victims **receive prompt and courteous attention** (35%) and **are believed** (36%) when reporting a crime.

## SECTION 4

### Access to Justice

#### 12. Access to Justice

**One in four (25%) respondents in Central America reported experiencing a legal problem in the last two years, on average.** While the prevalence and severity of problems vary by country, the most common problems relate to housing and land disputes. On average, 57% of respondents in Central America reported that their legal problem has been resolved and nearly three-quarters (73%) of all settled problems were resolved within 6 months.

- Nearly one-quarter (24%) of Panamanians reported experiencing a legal problem in the last two years (a figure below the regional average of 25%). The most commonly reported problem included land disputes and housing issues.
- Twenty-seven percent (27%) of surveyed Panamanians with a legal problem obtained advice from a person or organization that could help them better understand or resolve their problem, and approximately 7 in 10 (69%) reported that it was difficult or nearly impossible to find the money required to resolve their problem.
- Less than half (43%) of respondents in Panama who resolved their legal issue experienced at least one hardship during the resolution process. The most frequently cited hardship was health-related – 28% of respondents reported experiencing a physical or stress-related illness.

## SECTION 5

### Migration

#### 13. Internal Migration

**On average, roughly one-quarter (26%) of respondents in Central America reported having moved within their country.** Throughout the region, respondents consistently cited better economic or educational opportunities and family reasons as their primary reason for moving.

- Out of all Panamanians who migrated internally, respondents most frequently migrated to Panama City (19% of respondents) from another city in Panama.
- Panamanians who are younger than 30 were more likely to have migrated internally within the last three years.

#### 14. International Migration

**Compared to peer respondents in Central America, Hondurans most often reported that they would like to migrate internationally, while Panamanians least often reported the same.** Throughout the region, respondents consistently cited better economic or educational opportunities and less violence and corruption as their primary reasons for wanting to move. The United States was the top international migration destination for all respondents in the region. On average, 82% of respondents desiring to migrate internationally across the region have friends or family currently living in their destination country.

- Panamanians were less likely to want to move internationally in 2022 (14% of respondents) than in 2021 (20% of respondents). Compared to respondents in other cities in Panama, respondents in Colón most frequently reported wanting to move to another country (20% of respondents).

#### 15. Migration to the United States

**On average, 1 in 10 (10%) respondents in Central America have attempted to migrate to the United States.** The majority of those who had attempted to migrate to the United States from Central America had traveled via plane or bus and most frequently reported that they traveled alone. On average, of those who had entered the United States, Central American respondents most often cited their reason for leaving the United States as family or social reasons (16%) or having been deported by ICE (14%). Of the Central American respondents that attempted to migrate to the United States, an average of 12% of respondents were subjected to violence and 22% were asked for a bribe.

- Five percent (5%) of respondents in Panama have attempted to migrate to the United States and the majority (54%) of those respondents successfully entered the United States before returning to Panama.
- Forty-six percent (46%) of respondents who reported having attempted to migrate to the United States did not end up entering the country. Of those respondents, 38% were unable to enter because they did not receive correct permits or visas and 21% did not enter because they changed their minds.

Note: In addition to the data found in regional charts included in this report, comparative data for regional peer countries referenced in the Executive Findings can be found in each country's respective report.

SECTION I

AUTHORITARIANISM,  
FUNDAMENTAL  
FREEDOMS,  
AND  
ACCOUNTABILITY

11 Authoritarianism

13 Fundamental Freedoms

17 Government Accountability

# AUTHORITARIANISM

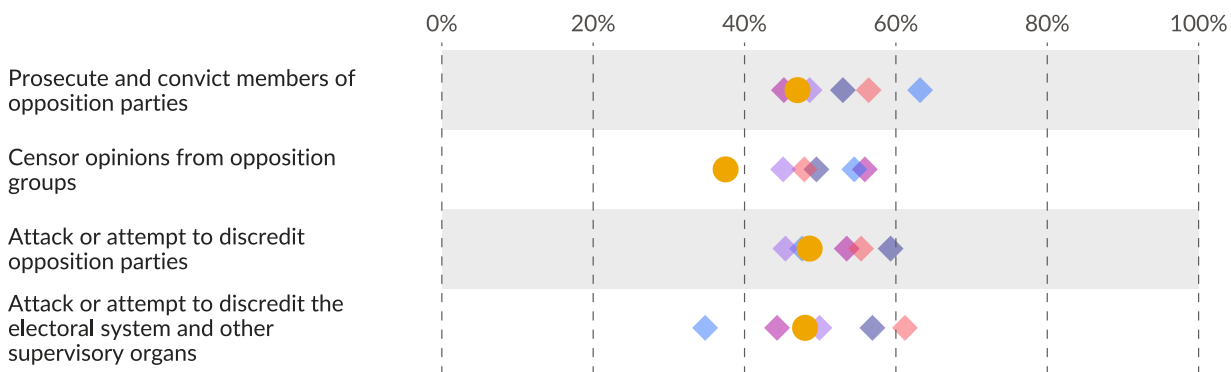
## CHART 1.

### Perceptions of Authoritarian Behaviors

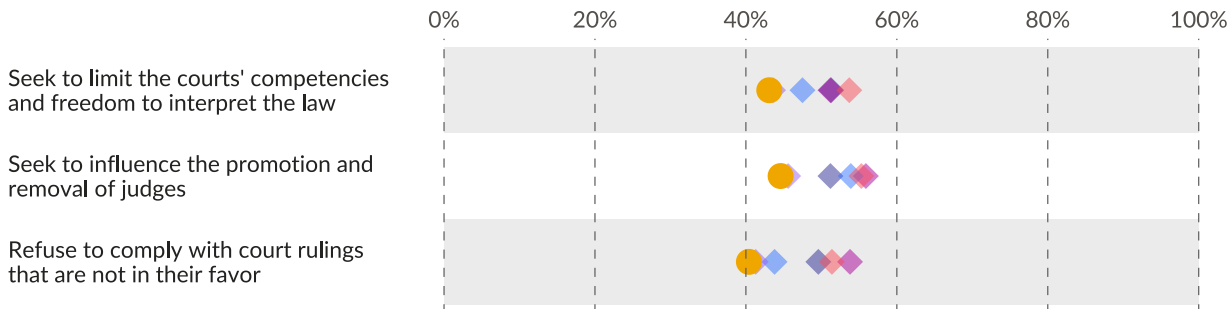
Percentage of respondents who believe that top government officials...

◆ Belize ◆ Costa Rica ◆ El Salvador ◆ Guatemala ◆ Honduras ● Panama

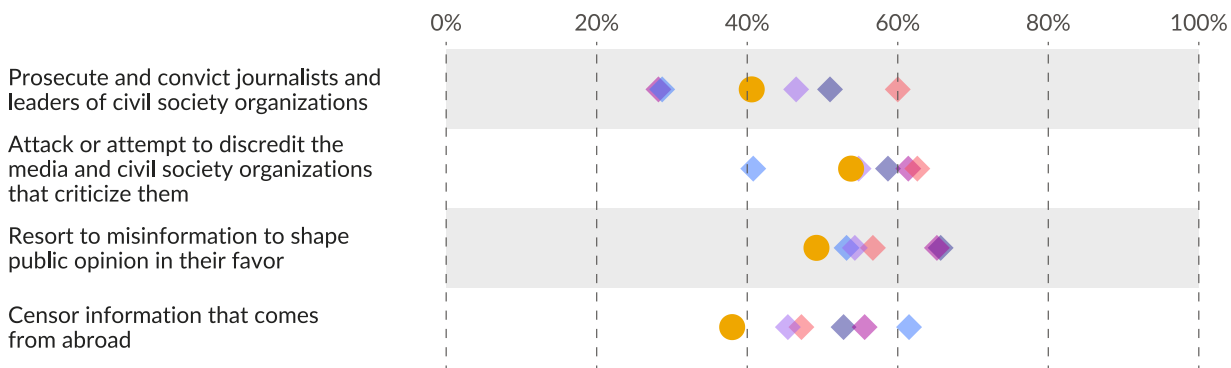
#### ATTACKS ON ELECTORAL SYSTEMS AND OPPOSITION PARTIES



#### ATTACKS ON THE JUDICIARY



#### ATTACKS ON THE MEDIA AND MISINFORMATION



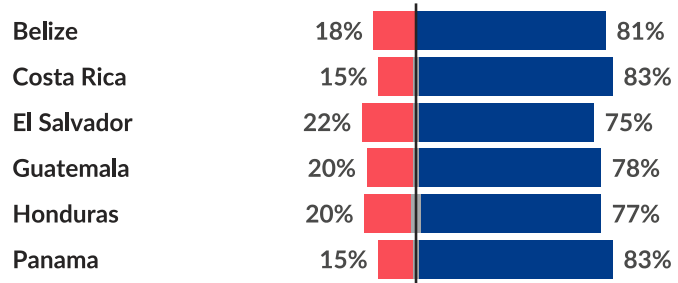
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

CHART 2.

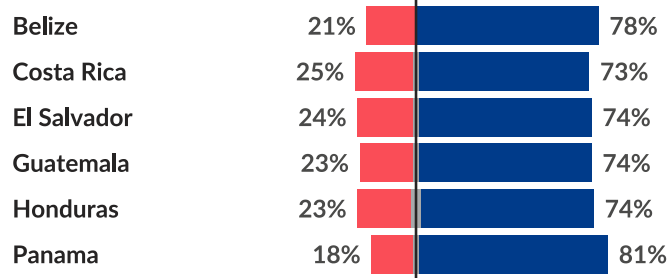
**Attitudes Towards Authoritarianism and Rule of Law**

Percentage of respondents who agree with the following statements

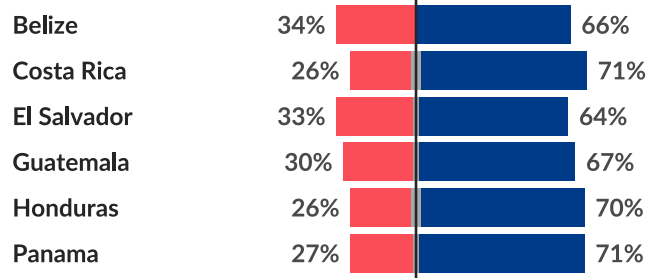
- The president can attack the media, civil society, and opposition groups
- The president must respect the media, civil society, and opposition groups
- None of the above



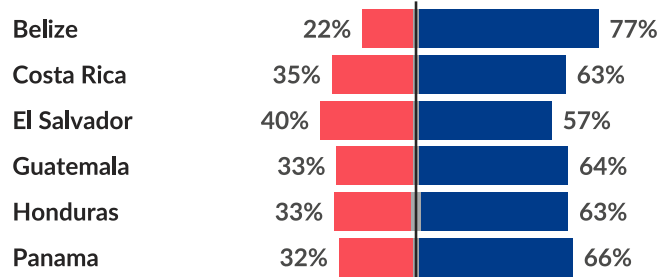
- The president can undermine independent authorities
- The president must respect independent authorities
- None of the above



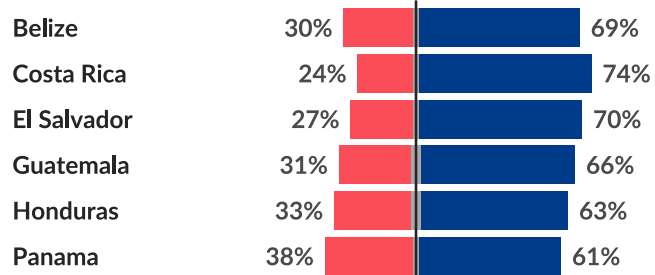
- Government efficiency is more important than citizen influence
- It is important that citizens have a say in government matters, even at the expense of efficiency
- None of the above



- The president should not be bound by the laws or courts
- The president must always obey the law and the courts
- None of the above



- It is not necessary to obey the laws of a government that you did not vote for
- It is important to obey the government in power, no matter who you voted for
- None of the above



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

# FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

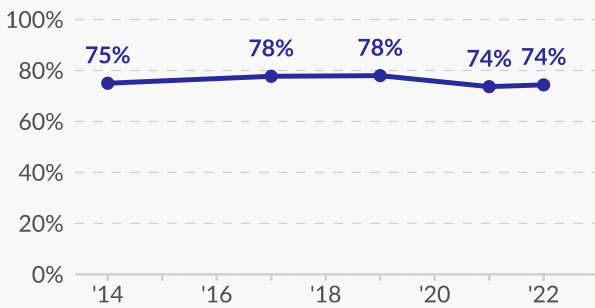
CHART 3.

## Fundamental Freedoms in Panama Over Time

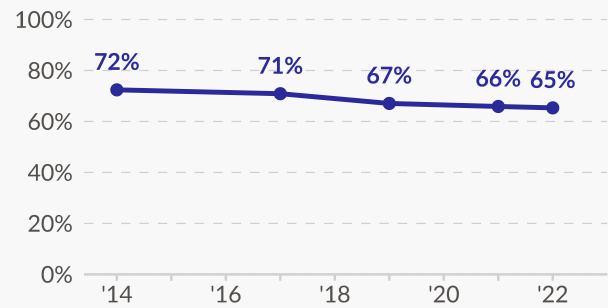
Percentage of respondents who believe the following statements

### EXPRESSION

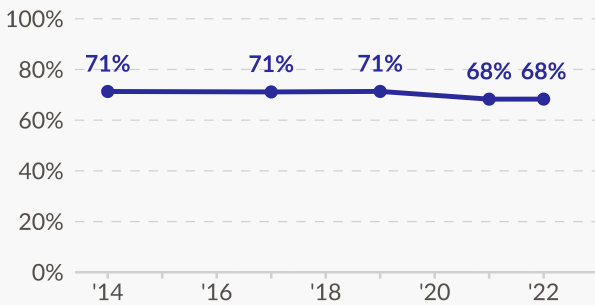
#### People can express opinions against the government



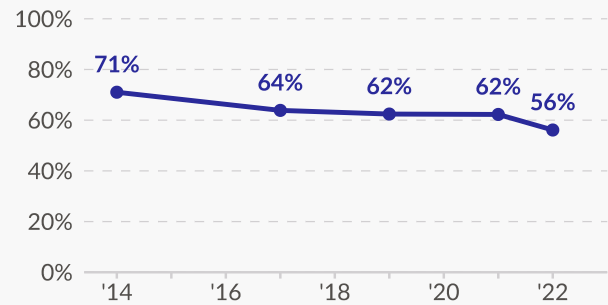
#### Civil society organizations can express opinions against the government



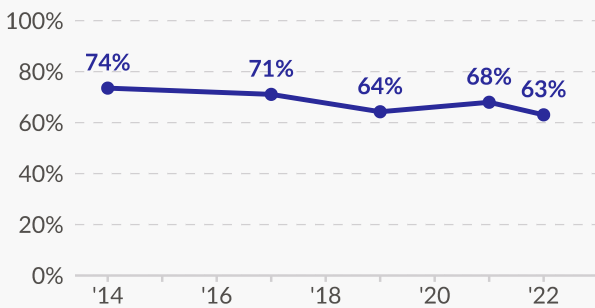
#### Political parties can express opinions against the government



#### The media can express opinions against the government without fear of retaliation



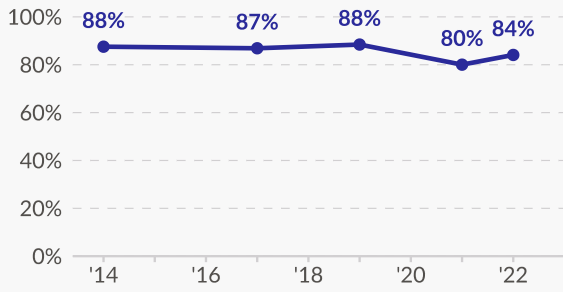
#### The media can expose cases of corruption



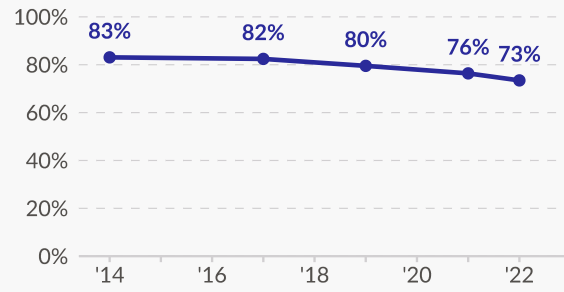
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022

## PARTICIPATION

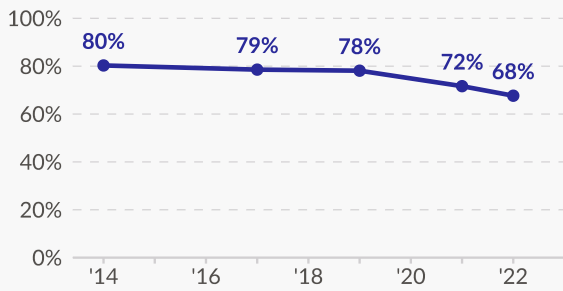
### People can attend community meetings



### People can join any political organization

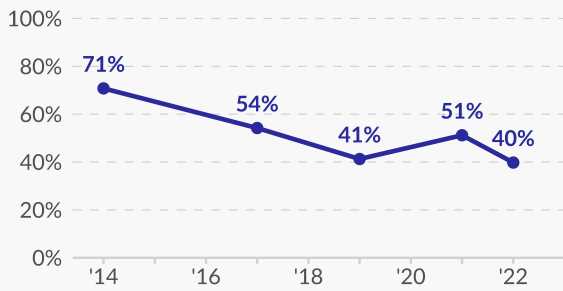


### People can organize around an issue or petition

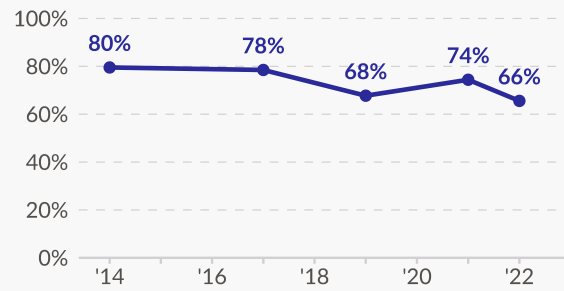


## ELECTIONS

### Local government officials are elected through a clean process

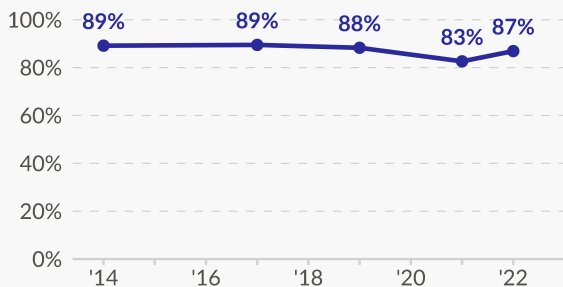


### People can vote freely without feeling harassed or pressured



## RELIGION

### Religious minorities can observe their holy days



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022

**CHART 4.**

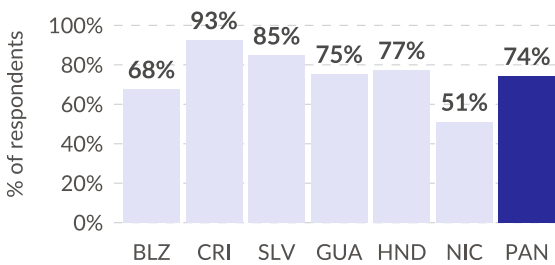
**Perceptions of Fundamental Freedoms in Central America**

Percentage of respondents who believe the following statements

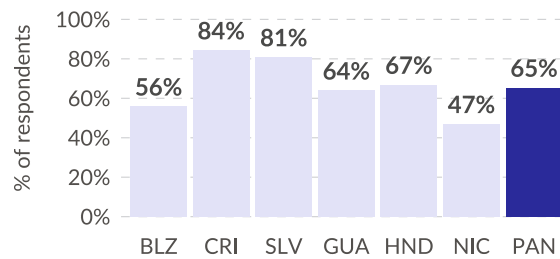
BLZ = Belize    CRI = Costa Rica    SLV = El Salvador    GUA = Guatemala    HND = Honduras    NIC = Nicaragua  
 PAN = Panama

**EXPRESSION**

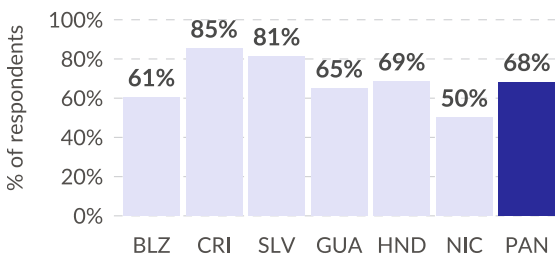
**People can express opinions against the government**



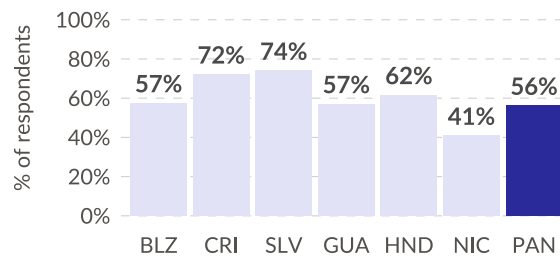
**Civil society organizations can express opinions against the government**



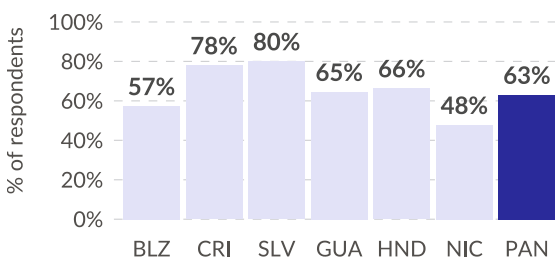
**Political parties can express opinions against the government**



**The media can express opinions against the government without fear of retaliation**



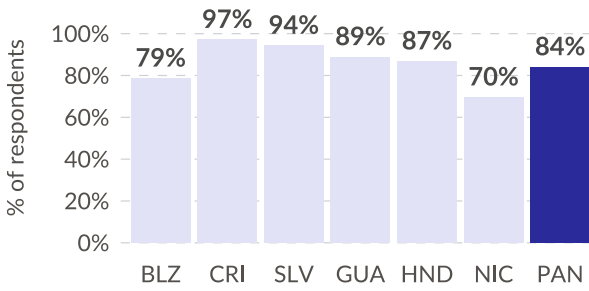
**The media can expose cases of corruption**



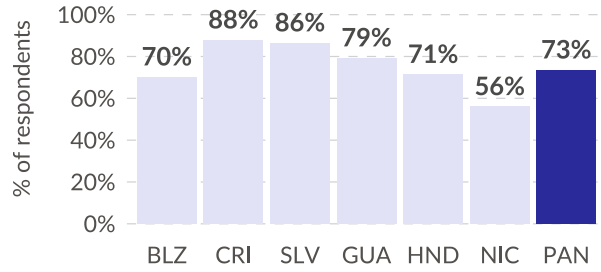
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

## PARTICIPATION

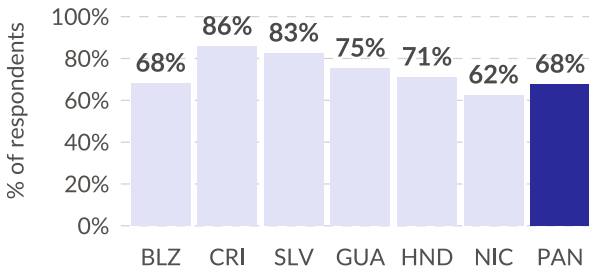
### People can attend community meetings



### People can join any political organization

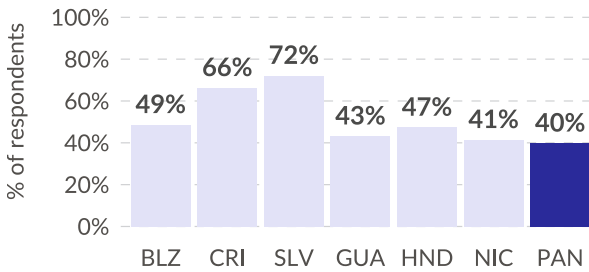


### People can organize around an issue or petition

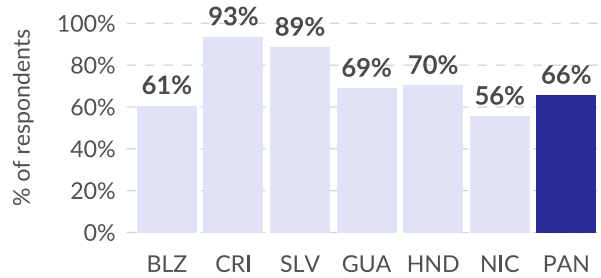


## ELECTIONS

### Local government officials are elected through a clean process

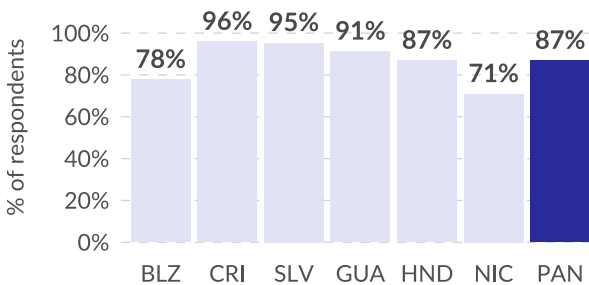


### People can vote freely without feeling harassed or pressured



## RELIGION

### Religious minorities can observe their holy days



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

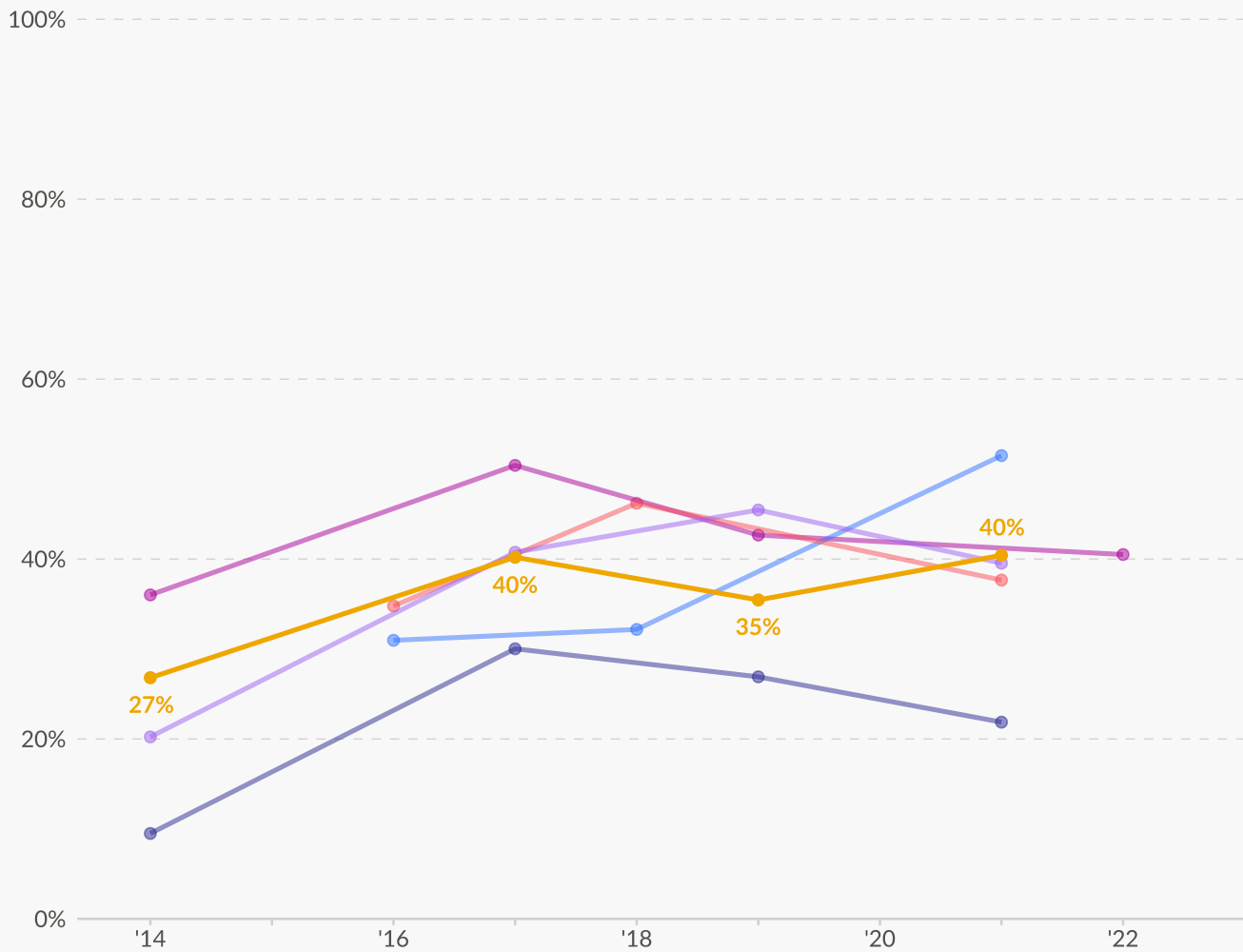
# GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

CHART 5.

## Perceptions of Accountability in Central America Over Time

Percentage of respondents in Panama and regional peer countries who believe that high-ranking government officials would be held accountable for breaking the law

● Belize ● Costa Rica ● El Salvador ● Guatemala ● Honduras ● Panama



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, and 2022

SECTION II  
CORRUPTION  
AND TRUST

- 19 Corruption
- 22 Bribery Victimization
- 23 Trust

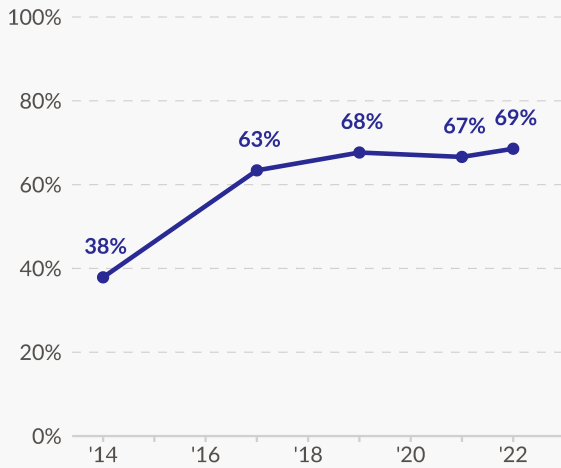
# CORRUPTION

CHART 6.

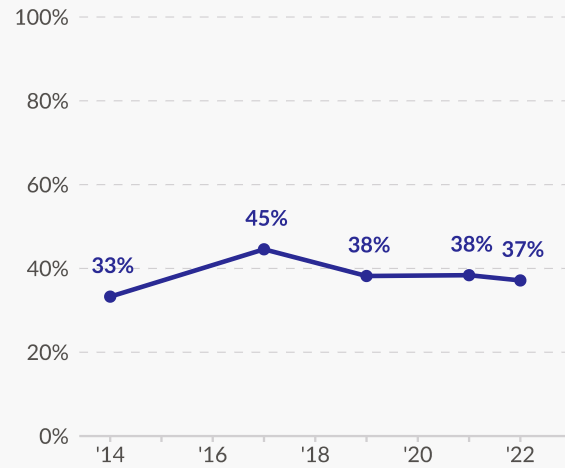
## Perceptions of Corruption by Institution Over Time

Percentage of respondents who believe that most or all people working in the following institutions are corrupt

### MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

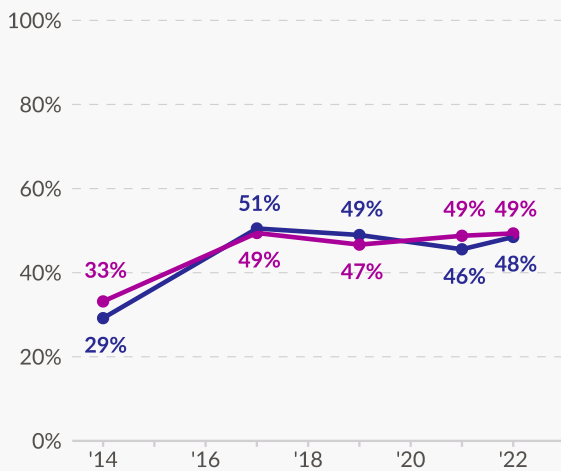


### POLICE OFFICERS



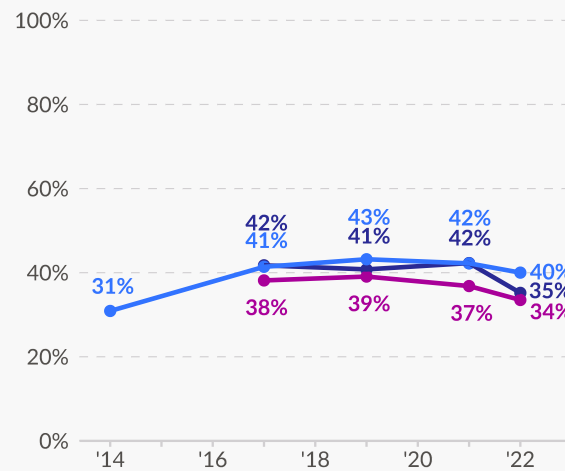
### EXECUTIVE

- Local Government Officers
- National Government Officers



### JUDICIARY

- Prosecutors
- Judges & Magistrates
- Public Defense Attorneys



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022

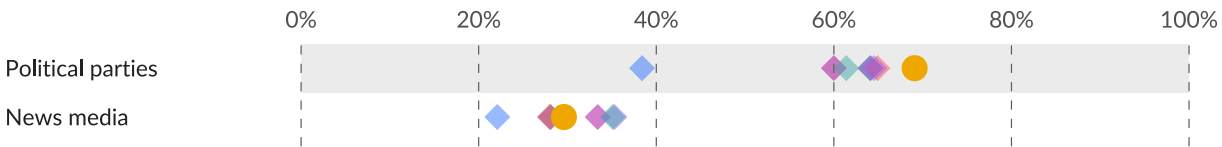
CHART 7.

Perceptions of Corruption in Central America, by Institution

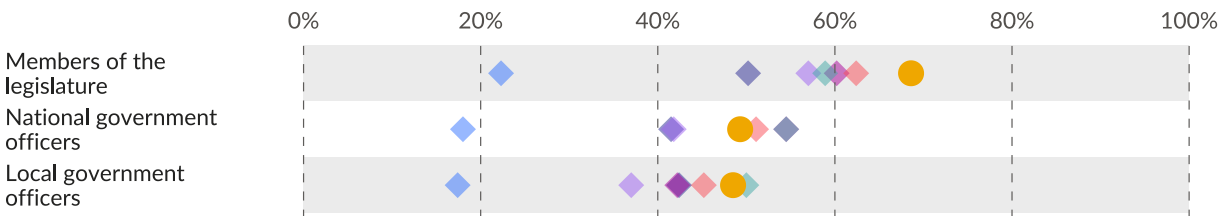
Percentage of respondents who think people in the following groups are involved in corrupt practices

◆ Belize ◆ Costa Rica ◆ El Salvador ◆ Guatemala ◆ Honduras ◆ Nicaragua ● Panama

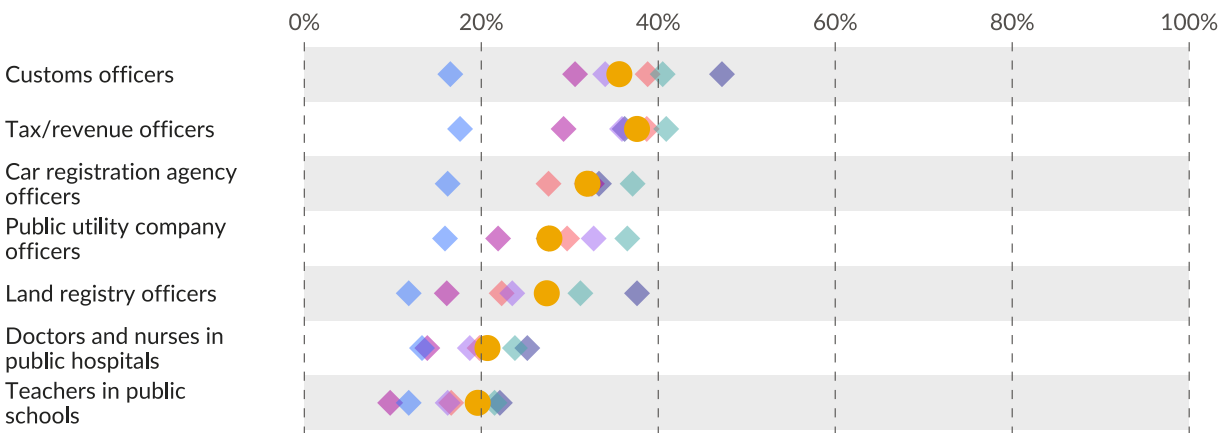
THE MEDIA AND POLITICAL PARTIES



NATIONAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT



ADMINISTRATIVE AND BUREAUCRATIC INSTITUTIONS



SECURITY AND JUSTICE INSTITUTIONS



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

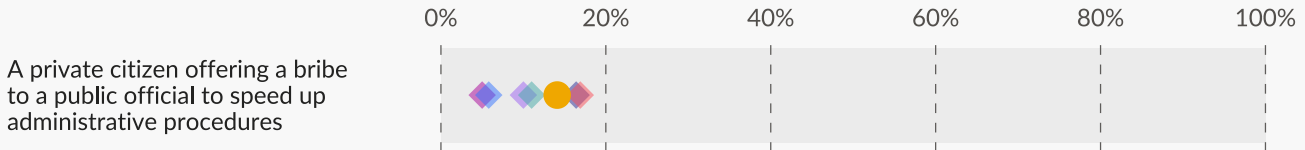
CHART 8.

## Attitudes Towards Corrupt Behaviors in Central America

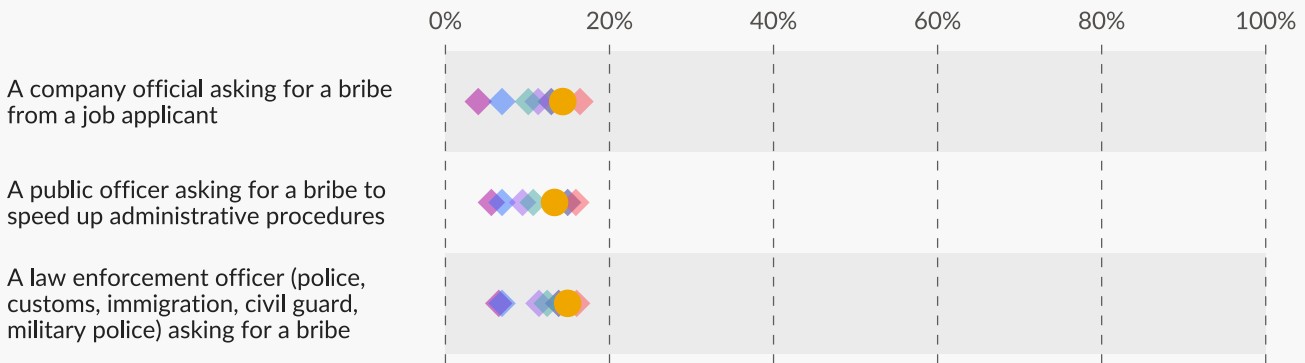
Percentage of respondents who believe the following behaviors are always or usually acceptable

◆ Belize ◆ Costa Rica ◆ El Salvador ◆ Guatemala ◆ Honduras ◆ Nicaragua ● Panama

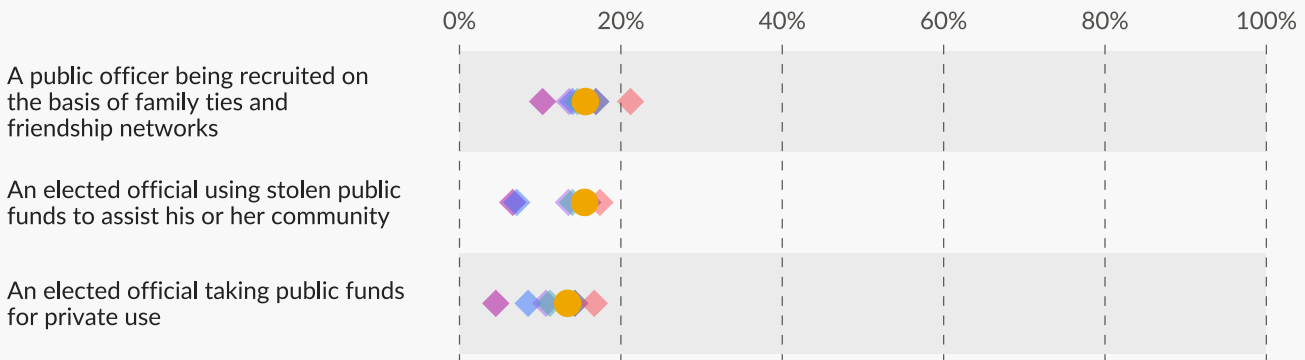
### BRIBES OFFERED



### BRIBES REQUESTED



### NEPOTISM AND EMBEZZLEMENT



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

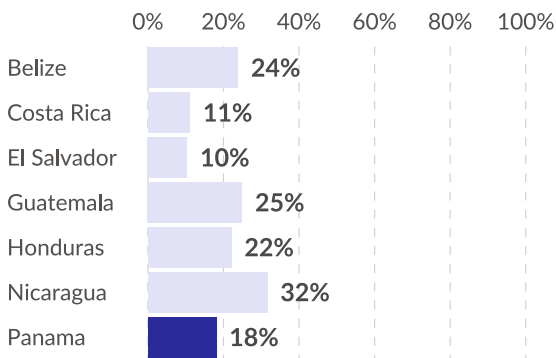
# BRIBERY VICTIMIZATION

CHART 9.

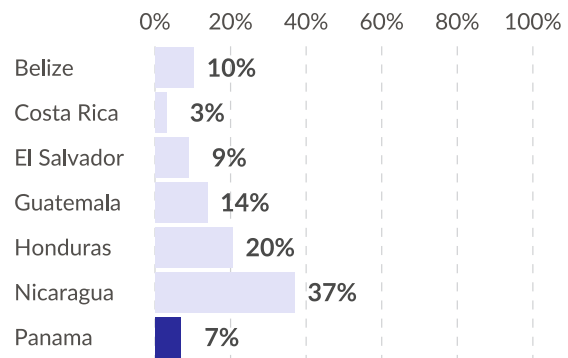
## Bribery Victimization in Panama and Regional Peer Countries

Percentage of respondents who paid a bribe in the last three years to access the following services, out of those who used these services

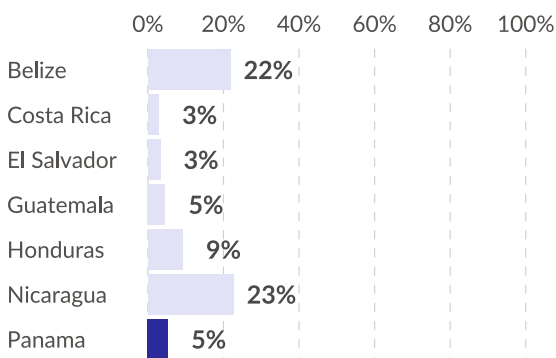
### REQUEST A GOVERNMENT PERMIT OR DOCUMENT



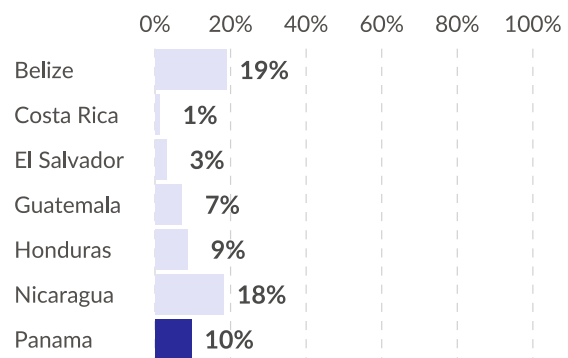
### REQUEST PUBLIC BENEFITS OR ASSISTANCE



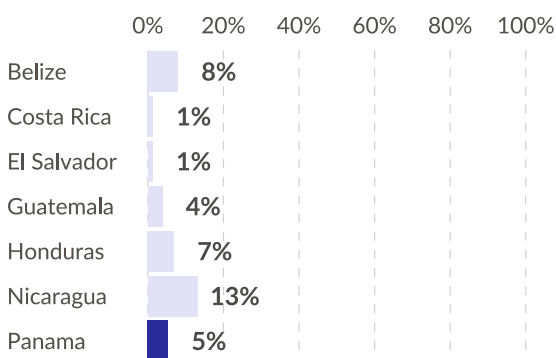
### OBTAIN A BIRTH CERTIFICATE OR GOVERNMENT ISSUED ID



### SECURE A PLACE AT A PUBLIC SCHOOL



### USE A PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

# TRUST

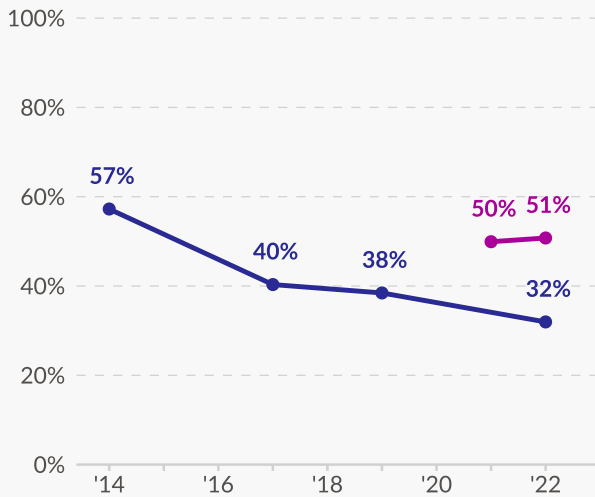
CHART 10.

## Trust in Institutions Over Time

Percentage of respondents who have a lot or some trust in...

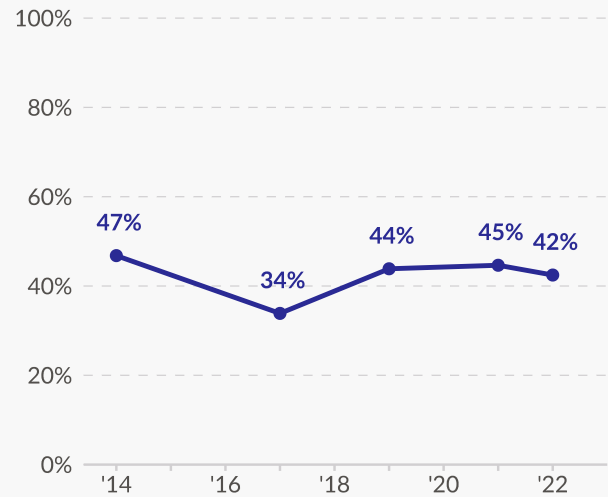
### PEOPLE LIVING IN THEIR COUNTRY

- People in their country
- People in their community



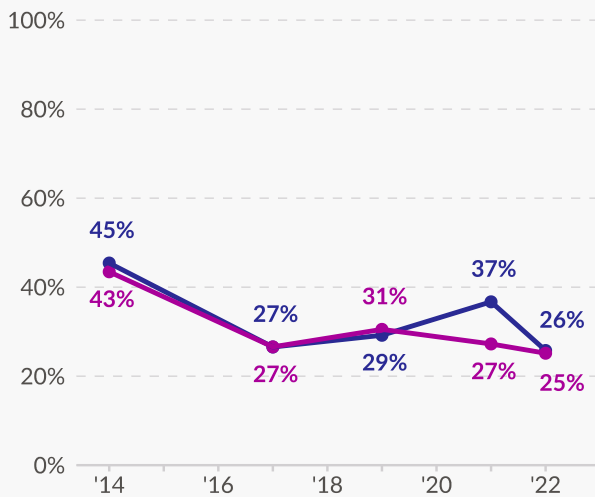
### LAW ENFORCEMENT

- Police Officers



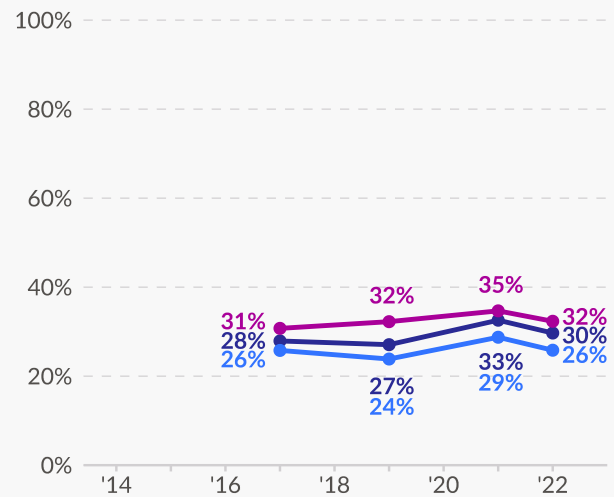
### EXECUTIVE

- Local Government Officers
- National Government Officers



### JUDICIARY

- Prosecutors
- Judges & Magistrates
- Public Defense Attorneys



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022

SECTION III  
**SECURITY AND  
CRIMINAL  
JUSTICE**

- 25 Crime Victimization
- 26 Security
- 27 Criminal Justice
- 29 Police
- 32 Victim Support

# CRIME VICTIMIZATION

CHART 11.1

## Types of Crimes Experienced by People in Panama

Victimization rate, by type of crime

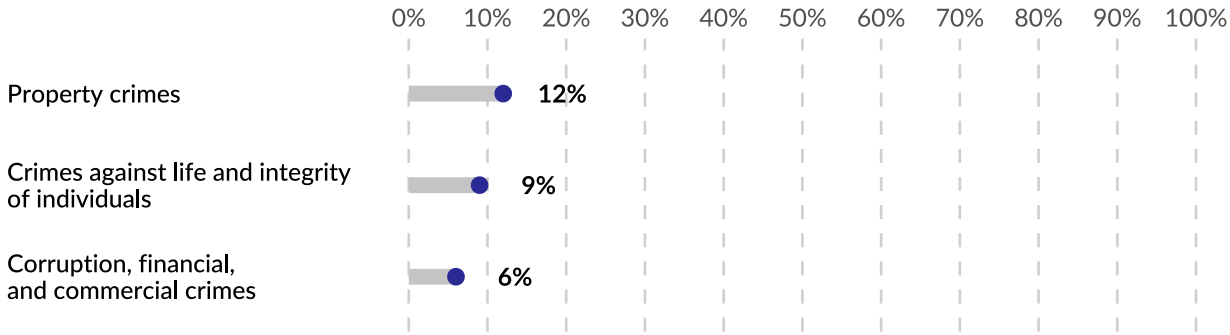
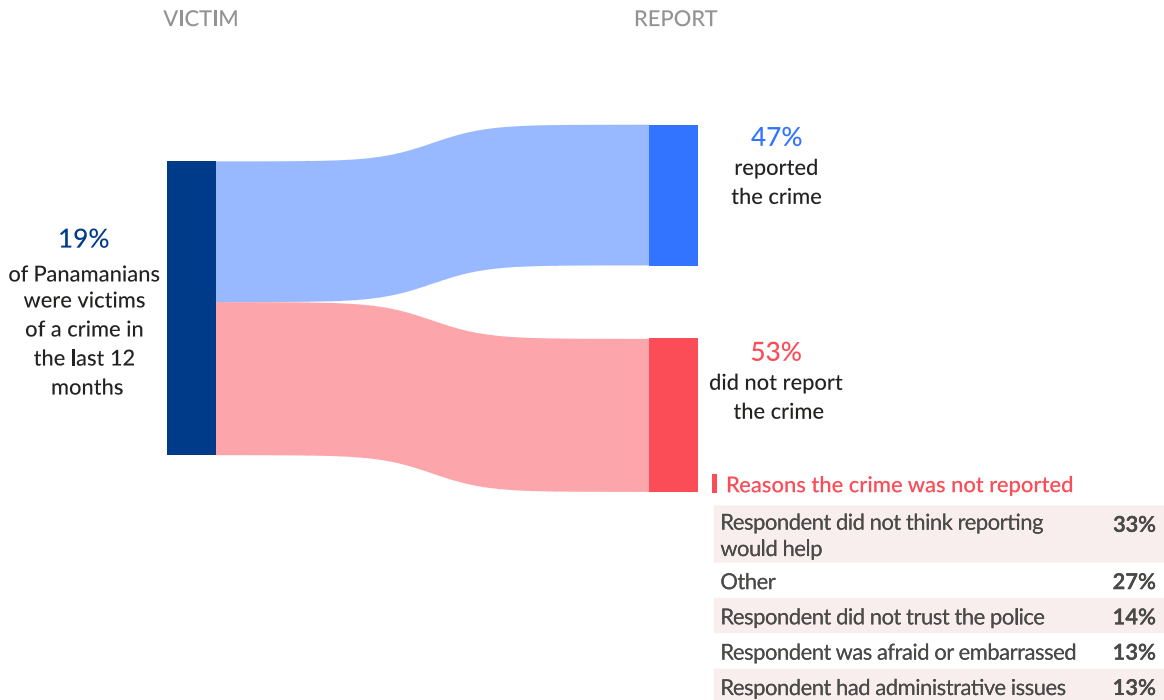


CHART 11.2

## Crime Victimization Rates and Reporting

Data on crime victimization and reporting in Panama



Note: For additional information on how Chart 11.1 and 11.2 were produced, please see the Appendix.

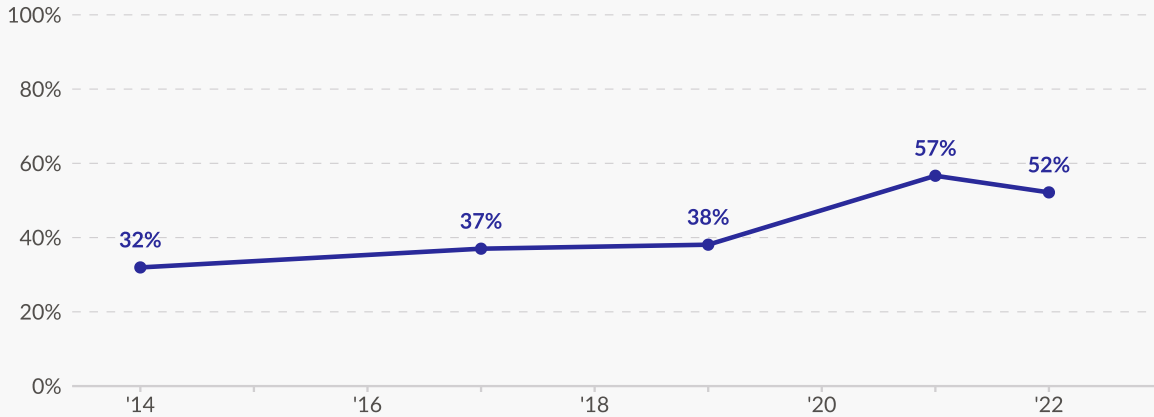
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

# SECURITY

CHART 12.1

## Perceptions of Security in Panama Over Time

Percentage of respondents who reported that they feel safe or very safe walking in their neighborhood at night

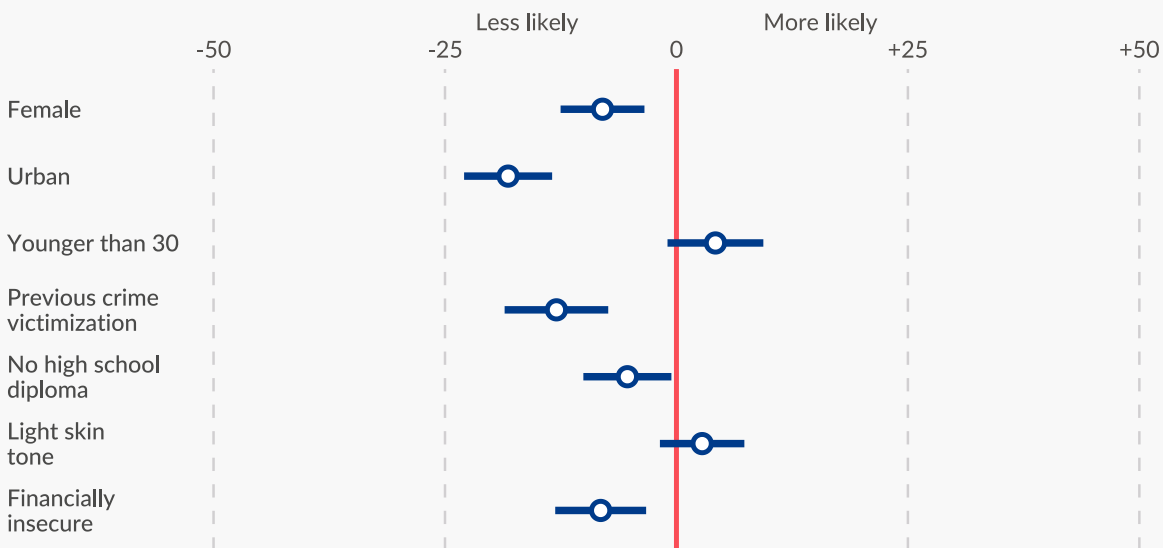


Source: WJP General Population Poll 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022

CHART 12.2

## Impact of Sociodemographic Characteristics on Perceptions of Safety

Likelihood that respondents feel safe or very safe walking in their neighborhood at night



Note: The results in this infographic were obtained from a logit regression. Each point indicates the average marginal effect of the corresponding sociodemographic characteristic on the predicted probability of a respondent to answer “safe” or “very safe” to the question “How safe do you feel walking in your neighborhood at night?” The lines indicate the 95% confidence intervals of each average marginal effect. For additional information on how Chart 12.2 was produced, please see the Regression Key linked in the Appendix.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

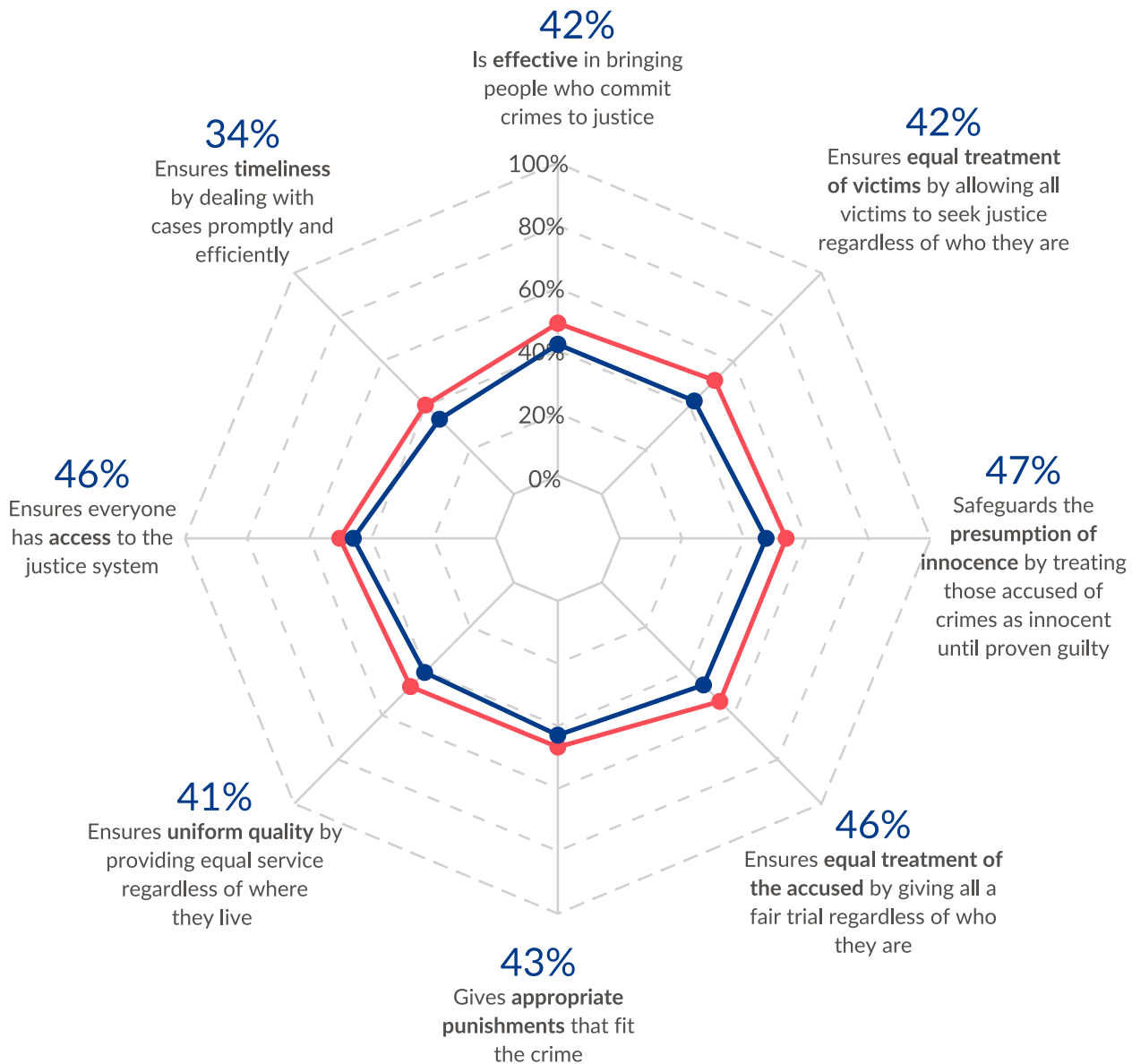
# CRIMINAL JUSTICE

CHART 13.

## Perceptions of the Criminal Justice System in Panama

Percentage of respondents who are confident that the criminal justice system...

● 2022 ● 2021



Note: For additional information on how Chart 13 was produced, please see the Appendix.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2021 and 2022

CHART 14.

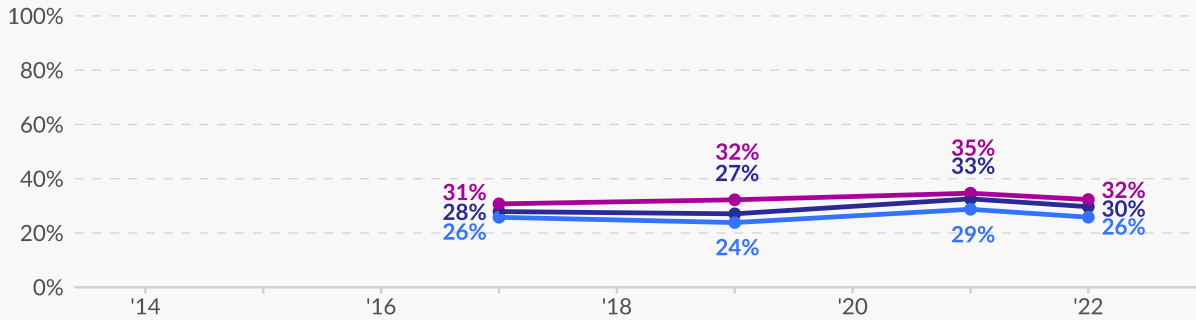
**Criminal Justice Actors**

Perceptions of criminal justice actors in Panama

● Prosecutors ● Public Defense Attorneys ● Judges & Magistrates

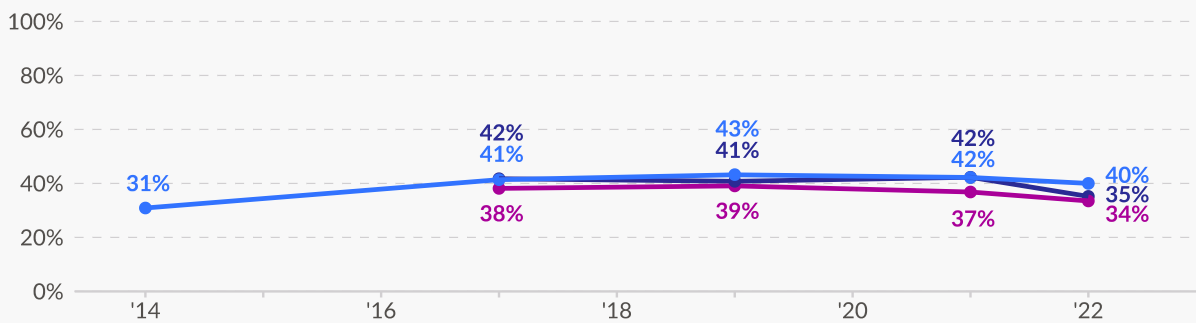
**TRUST IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACTORS OVER TIME**

Percentage of respondents who have a lot or some trust in prosecutors, public defense attorneys, and judges and magistrates



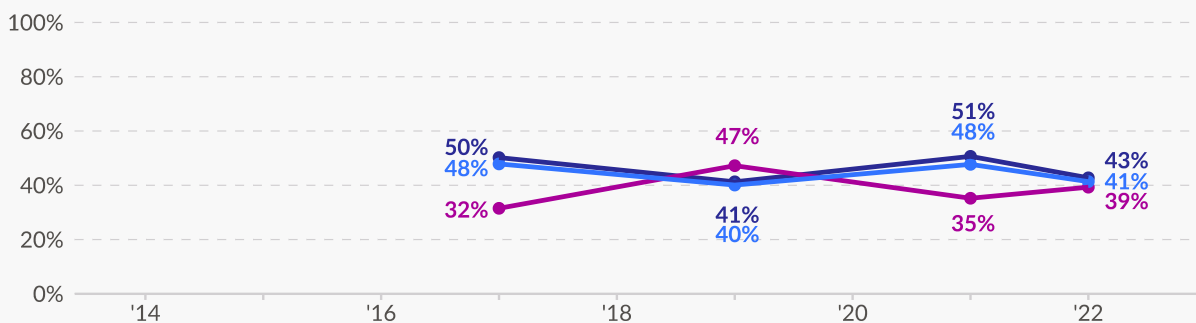
**PERCEPTIONS OF CORRUPTION ACROSS CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACTORS OVER TIME**

Percentage of respondents who believe that most or all prosecutors, public defense attorneys, and judges and magistrates are corrupt



**PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVENESS ACROSS CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACTORS OVER TIME**

Percentage of respondents who believe that prosecutors, public defense attorneys, and judges and magistrates do their job well



Note: Variables in Effectiveness category are as follows: Prosecutors prosecute crimes committed in an independent manner and are not subject to any sort of pressure; Public defenders do everything they can to defend poor people that are accused of committing a crime; Judges decide cases in an independent manner and are not subject to any sort of pressure.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2014, 2017, 2019, 2021, and 2022

# POLICE

## CHART 15.

### Perceptions of the Police

Opinions on the effectiveness and legitimacy of law enforcement

#### EFFECTIVENESS

##### Serve the Public

Percentage of respondents who believe that the police...

Are available to help when needed



Serve the interests of the community



Serve the interests of regular citizens



##### Crime Control and Safety

Percentage of respondents who believe that the police...

Respond to crime reports



Resolve security problems in the community



Perform effective and lawful investigations



Help them feel safe



#### LEGITIMACY

##### Due Process

Percentage of respondents who believe that the police...

Act lawfully



Do not use excessive force



Respect the rights of suspects



Treat all people with respect



##### Discrimination

Percentage of respondents who believe that the police do not discriminate against suspects based on....

Age



Tattoos



Indigenous identity



Skin color



Gender



## Corruption

Percentage of respondents who believe that the police...

Are not involved in corrupt practices



Investigate crimes in an independent manner



Do not serve the interests of gangs



Do not serve the interests of politicians



## Trust and Crime Reporting

Percentage of respondents who...

Trust the police



Report a crime when they are a victim



Feel safe in their neighborhoods



## Accountability

Percentage of respondents who believe that the police...

Are held accountable for violating laws



Are held accountable for seeking bribes



Are held accountable for accepting bribes



Are investigated for misconduct



Note: For additional information on how Chart 15 was produced, please see the Appendix.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

## CHART 16.

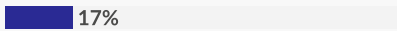
### Interactions with the Police

Experiences of respondents in Panama who interacted with the police

#### VOLUNTARY

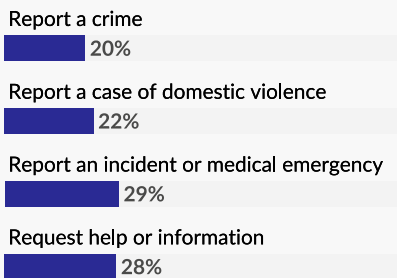
##### Total voluntary interactions

Percentage of respondents who contacted the police



##### Causes

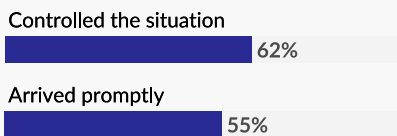
Reasons reported by respondents who contacted the police



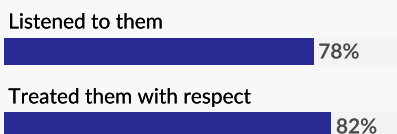
##### Experience during the last interaction

Percentage of respondents who said that the police...

##### SERVE THE PUBLIC



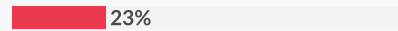
##### DUE PROCESS



#### INVOLUNTARY

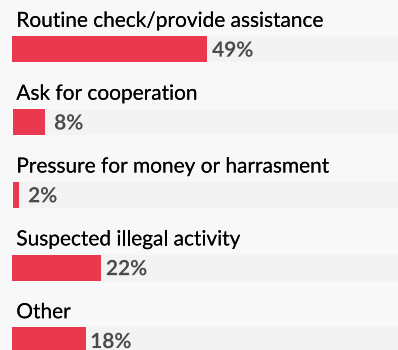
##### Total involuntary interactions

Percentage of respondents who were contacted by the police



##### Causes

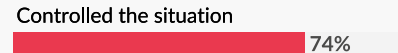
Reasons reported by respondents who were contacted by the police



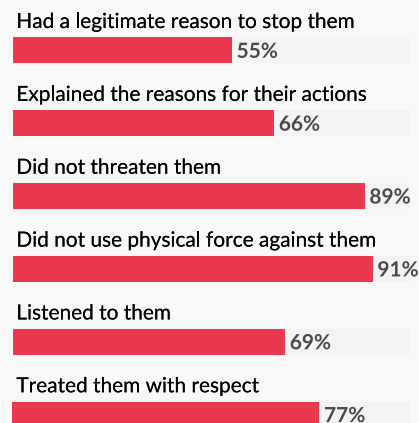
##### Experience during the last interaction

Percentage of respondents who said that the police...

##### SERVE THE PUBLIC



##### DUE PROCESS



Note: For additional information on how Chart 16 was produced, please see the Appendix.

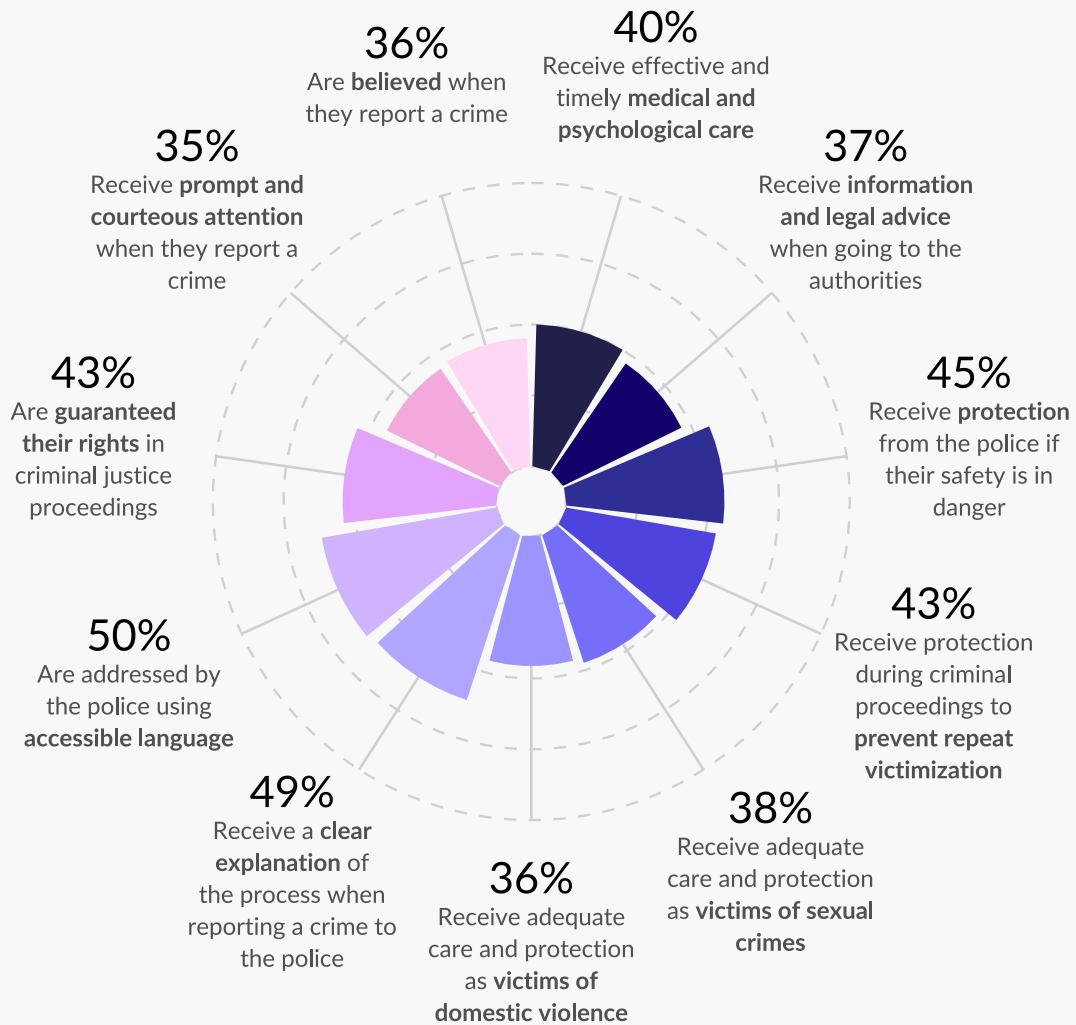
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2021

# VICTIM SUPPORT

CHART 17.

## Perceptions of the Treatment of Crime Victims

Percentage of respondents who are confident that crime victims...



Note: For additional information on how Chart 17 was produced, please see the Appendix.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

SECTION IV  
ACCESS TO  
JUSTICE

# ACCESS TO JUSTICE JOURNEY

CHART 18.

## Justice Journey in Panama

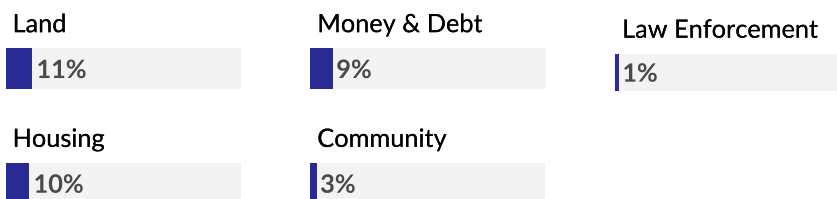
Paths followed by Panamanians who experienced a legal problem in the last two years

### ▶ PART 1. Legal Problems

**24%**

Experienced a legal problem in the past 2 years

#### Incidence by type of problem:



### ▶ PART 2. Legal

#### Information

**69%**

Knew where to get advice and information

#### Expert Help

**60%**

Felt that they could get all the expert help they wanted

#### Confidence

**70%**

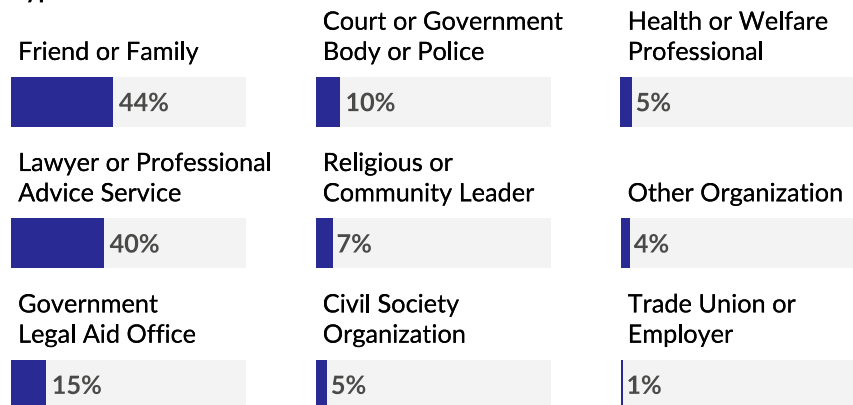
Were confident that they could achieve a fair outcome

### ▶ PART 3. Sources of Help

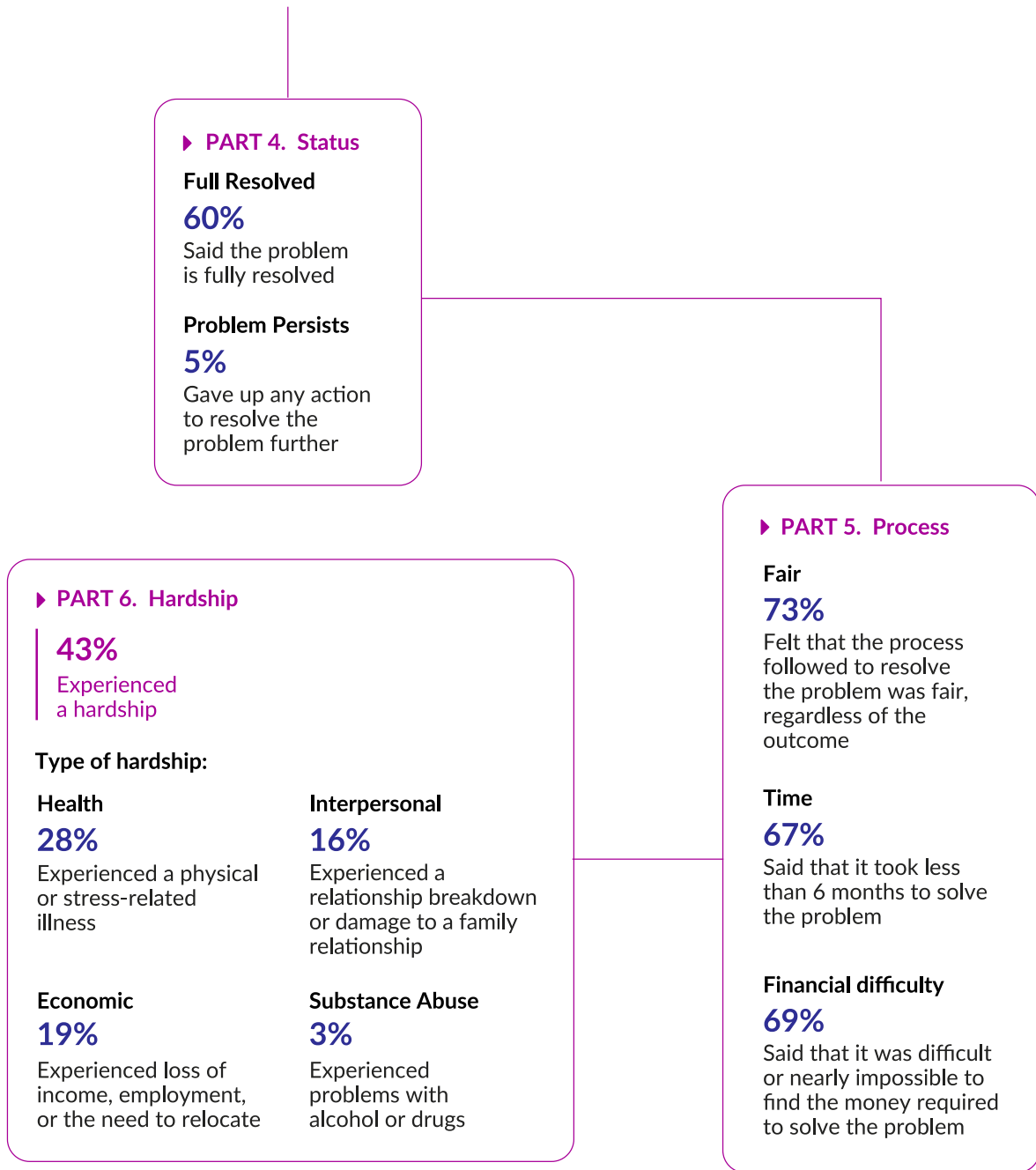
**27%**

Were able to access help

#### Type of advisor:



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022



Note: For additional information on how Chart 18 was produced, please see the Appendix.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

SECTION V  
**MIGRATION**

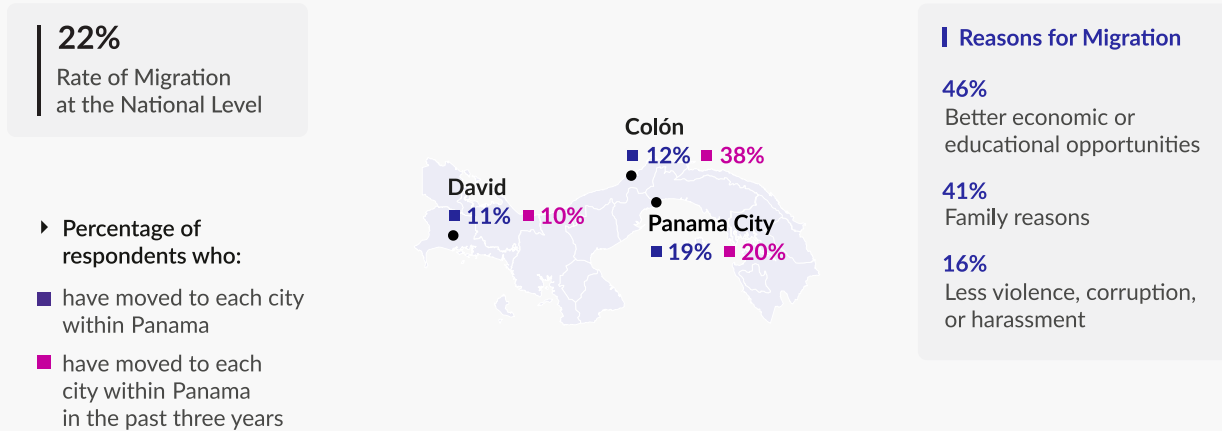
- 37 Internal Migration
- 38 International Migration
- 39 Migration to the United States

# INTERNAL MIGRATION

CHART 19.1

## Rates of Internal Migration, by City

Percentage of respondents who moved within Panama and reasons for migration



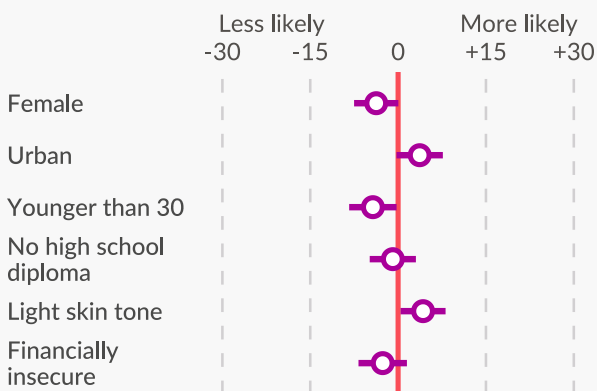
Note: For additional information on how Chart 19.1 was produced, please see the Appendix.

CHART 19.2

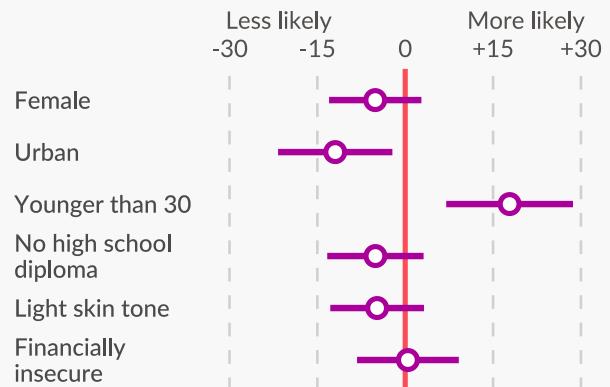
## Impact of Sociodemographic Characteristics on Internal Migration

Likelihood that respondents...

### HAVE MIGRATED WITHIN PANAMA



### HAVE MIGRATED WITHIN PANAMA IN THE LAST 3 YEARS



Note: These figures show the results of two logit regressions. On the left, each point indicates the average marginal effect of the corresponding sociodemographic characteristic on the predicted probability that a respondent answers “no” to the question “Do you live in the same city in which you were born?” On the right, each point indicates the average marginal effect of the corresponding sociodemographic characteristic on the predicted probability that a respondent answers “less than a year” or “1-3 years” to the question “How long have you lived in this city?” The lines indicate the 95% confidence intervals of each average marginal effect. For additional information on how Chart 19.2 was produced, please see the Appendix.

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

# INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION

CHART 20.1

## International Migration Intentions

Percentage of respondents who would like, or have plans, to move internationally, by country

● Percentage of respondents who would like to move internationally
 ● Percentage of respondents who have plans to move internationally
 ● 2021 percentage

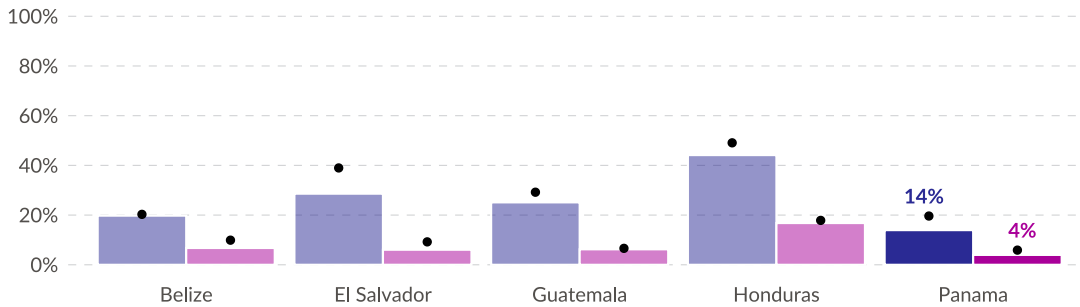
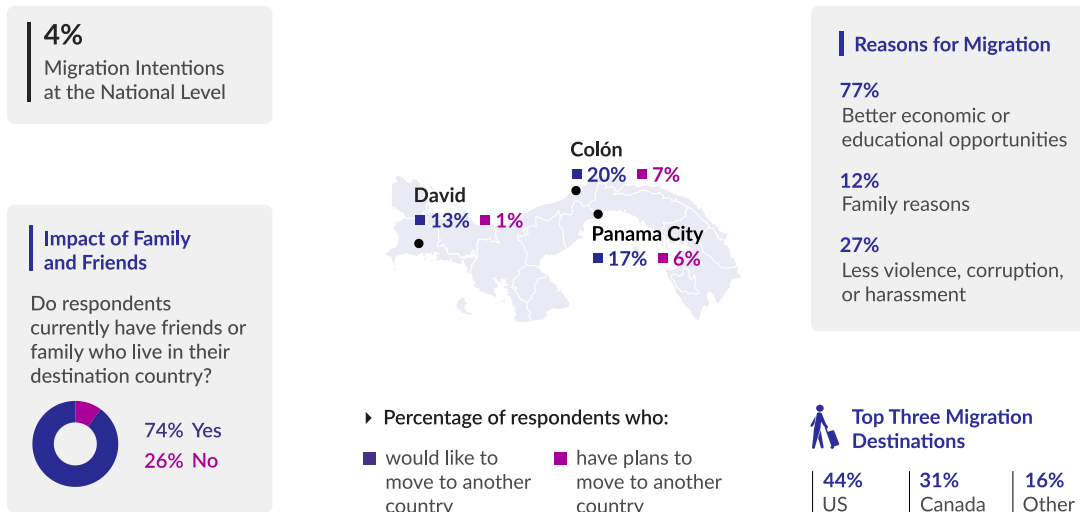


CHART 20.2

## International Migration by City

Percentage of respondents who would like, or have plans, to migrate internationally, by city



Note: For additional information on how Chart 20.2 was produced, please see the Appendix.

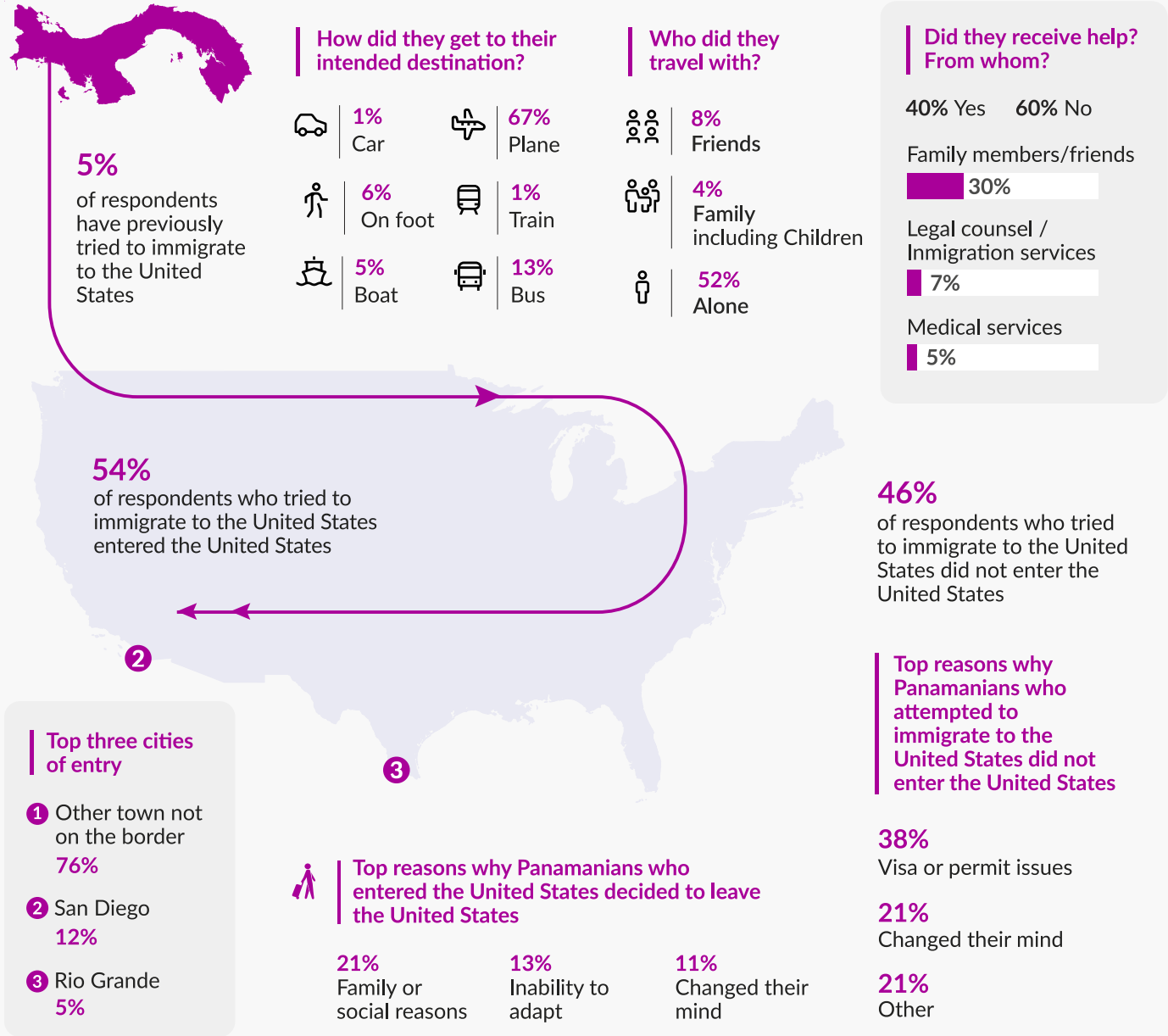
Source: WJP General Population Poll 2021 and 2022

# MIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES

CHART 21.

## Pathway to the United States

Experiences of Panamanians who reported attempting to migrate to the United States



Note: In Chart 21, "Family or social reasons" reflects related responses under the "To visit family or friends, go on vacation, or attend a social or religious event" and "Other (specify)" categories in the question "What was the main reason you left the US?"

Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

CHART 22.1.

### Insecurity on the Journey to the United States

Percentage of respondents who were subjected to violence or had to pay a bribe during their journey to the United States

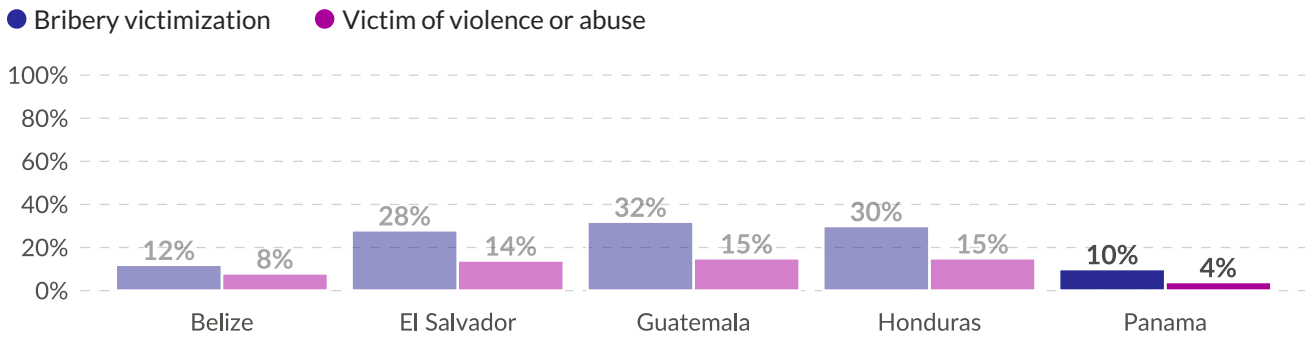


CHART 22.2.

### Violence Experienced by Migrants from Panama

Victimization rates, by type of violence

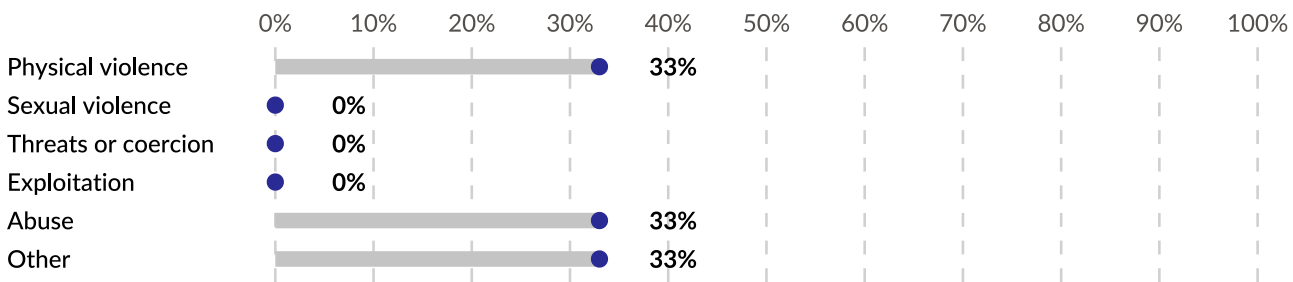
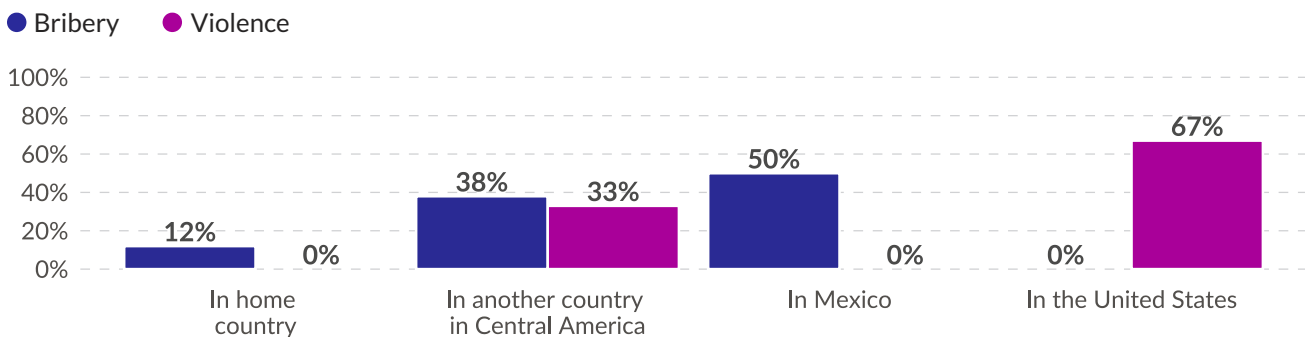


CHART 22.3.

### Violence and Bribery Victimization, by Stage of the Journey

Percentage of Panamanians who were subjected to violence or had to pay a bribe during each stage of the journey to the United States



Source: WJP General Population Poll 2022

# PROJECT DESIGN

42 Methodology

# METHODOLOGY

To present an image that accurately portrays the rule of law as experienced by ordinary people, data in this report is drawn from the General Population Poll (GPP), an original data source designed and collected by the World Justice Project (WJP). The GPP captures the experiences and perceptions of ordinary citizens concerning the performance of the state and its agents and the actual operation of the legal framework in their country.

The General Population Poll used to collect data in Panama in 2022 features several new questions that highlight perceptions on issues salient to the region, including corruption, authoritarian behaviors, police performance, criminal justice, and security. In total, the General Population Poll questionnaire includes 162 perception-based questions and 86 experience-based questions, along with sociodemographic information on all respondents. Additionally, the GPP in Panama was administered to a sample of 2,023 respondents.

## Data Collection

The GPP in Panama was conducted for the WJP's *The Rule of Law in Panama: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2022* with sampling, fieldwork, and data processing by CID Gallup, based in San José, Costa Rica. CID Gallup administered the surveys in December 2022, conducting face-to-face interviews using a multi-stage stratified random sampling design. The target population group for this survey included Panamanians aged 18 years or older residing across 10 provinces and two *comarcas* throughout the country.

## SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLE FRAME

The General Population Poll in Panama represents an achieved total sample size of 2,023 interviews distributed proportionally across two regions. CID Gallup based the sampling frame on 2022 population figures from the National Institute of Statistics and Census of Panama (INEC), acquiring a proportionally stratified sample by region, age, gender, socioeconomic status, and level of urbanization.

In order to address all relevant topics while controlling the questionnaire length, the World Justice Project split three of the survey modules into two versions (Option A and Option B) and randomly assigned one option to each respondent for each module. These modules included: Hypothetical Situations, Civic Participation, and Institutional Performance. Aside from these modules, the questionnaires are identical. A link to the complete survey instrument, in English and Spanish, can be found in the Appendix of this report.

## SAMPLING

Regions, provinces and *comarcas*, and districts were selected to achieve a nationally representative sample of the country based on population density and geographic coverage. Within districts, *corregimientos*, or jurisdictions, were then selected as the primary sampling unit using probability proportionate to size sampling. Individual enumeration areas consisted of neighborhood blocks and were selected via simple random sampling. The number of enumeration areas assigned to each district was determined based on relative population size. Within each enumeration area, survey administrators performed a systematic random route to sample households and used a Kish grid to select respondents. If the selected respondent declined to be interviewed or otherwise did not meet the characteristics of the target quota, the interviewer moved on to the next household.

## DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

**COVERAGE:** Interviews were distributed across regions to create a nationally representative sample. Sixty-three percent (63%) of the interviews took place in the Metropolitan area and the remaining 37% of the interviews took place in the rest of the country.

**GEOGRAPHY:** Thirty-two percent (32%) of respondents resided in rural areas and municipalities, while 68% of respondents resided in metro areas or cities.

**RACIAL AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND:** Thirty-five percent (35%) of respondents identified themselves as Mestizo, followed by Afro-Panamanian (19%) and Indigenous (17%).

**GENDER:** Fifty-two percent (52%) of respondents were female and 48% were male.

**EDUCATION:** Most respondents (51%) reported that they had received at least a high school diploma or vocational degree, and the remaining 49% of respondents received up to a middle school diploma.

## RESPONSE RATES

Eligible household, non-interview	1,649
Refusals	1,185
Break-off	97
Non-contact	367
Ineligible household	177
No eligible respondent in the household	41
Quota filled	136

## INTERVIEWING AND QUALITY CONTROL

In total, 68 interviewers worked on this project, including 59 female interviewers. Enumerators worked in 17 groups of four interviewers with one supervisor each. Interviews were conducted in Spanish.

The supervisory team directly oversaw 36% of all interviews in the field. During data processing, 829 interviews (approximately 41% of the sample) were selected for audio review by the central office. Additional quality control measures included geofencing, audio quality checks, and checks for abnormal interview length. Interviews averaged 46 minutes in length and ranged from 35 to 61 minutes.

## DATA REVIEW AND JUSTIFICATION

As part of the data analysis process, the team consulted several third-party sources in order to contextualize and validate perception-based data captured by the General Population Poll and compare it with the objective rule of law situation in-country. Peer data sources consulted include select indicators measured by the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP)'s *AmericasBarometer*, *Latinobarómetro*, *Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem)*, *Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index*, the Bertelsmann Stiftung's *Transformation Index (BTI)*, and *Freedom House's Freedom in the World*. While certain trends captured by the 2022 General Population Poll in Panama are comparable to trends in perceptions data measured by other indices, the experiences and perceptions presented in this report may not always coincide with the reality of Panama's rule of law performance as measured by other sources.

## HISTORICAL DATA

Historical data in this report derives from the *WJP Rule of Law Index®*'s General Population Poll that is typically administered every two to three years using a nationally representative probability sample ranging from 500 to 1,000 respondents. These household surveys were administered in the three largest cities of most countries until 2018, when the World Justice Project transitioned to nationally representative coverage as the preferred methodology for polling. The historical polling data used in this year's reports was collected in the following intervals: Data for Belize, Costa Rica, and Honduras was collected in 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2022. Data for Panama was collected in 2014, 2017, 2019, and 2022. Data for El Salvador and Guatemala was collected in 2016, 2018, and 2022.

## ADDITIONAL COUNTRIES

*The Rule of Law in Panama: Key Findings from the General Population Poll 2022* includes comparisons to the following Central American countries surveyed by the World Justice Project during the same period: Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua. This report is additionally part of a series that presents findings from the following five sub-regions within Latin America and the Caribbean: Andes (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru); Southern Cone (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay); Eastern Caribbean (Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago); Greater Antilles, The Bahamas, and the Guianas (The Bahamas, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname); and Central America (Belize, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama). Together, these 26 countries are a portion of the 140 countries and jurisdictions included in the *WJP Rule of Law Index 2022* report. Detailed information regarding the methodology of the *Rule of Law Index* is available at: [www.worldjusticeproject.org](http://www.worldjusticeproject.org).

Country	Polling Company	Methodology	Sample
Argentina	StatMark Group	Face-to-face	759
The Bahamas	DMR Insights Ltd.	Face-to-face	500
Barbados	DMR Insights Ltd.	Face-to-face	500
Belize	CID Gallup	Face-to-face	1,500
Bolivia	Captura Consulting	Face-to-face	1,000
Brazil	About Brazil Market Research	Face-to-face	1,109
Colombia	Tempo Group SA	Face-to-face	1,000
Costa Rica	CID Gallup	Face-to-face	1,005
Dominica	DMR Insights Ltd.	Face-to-face	500
Dominican Republic	CID Gallup	Face-to-face	1,002
Ecuador	StatMark Group	Face-to-face	1,005
El Salvador	CID Gallup	Face-to-face	2,010
Grenada	DMR Insights Ltd.	Face-to-face	500
Guatemala	Mercaplan	Face-to-face	2,002
Guyana	StatMark Group	Face-to-face	500
Haiti	CID Gallup	Face-to-face	507
Honduras	Mercaplan	Face-to-face	2,000
Jamaica	StatMark Group	Face-to-face	1,001
Nicaragua	CID Gallup	Telephone	1,014
Panama	CID Gallup	Face-to-face	2,023
Paraguay	Datum Internacional S.A./BM Business Partners	Face-to-face	1,000
Peru	Datum Internacional S.A.	Face-to-face	1,029
St. Lucia	DMR Insights Ltd.	Face-to-face	500
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	DMR Insights Ltd.	Face-to-face	500
Suriname	D3: Designs, Data, Decisions	Face-to-face	502
Trinidad and Tobago	CID Gallup	Face-to-face	1,001

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# APPENDIX

## Methodological Materials

### GENERAL POPULATION POLL (GPP)

The General Population Poll in Central America was designed to capture high-quality data on the realities and concerns of ordinary people on a variety of themes related to the rule of law, including authoritarianism, government accountability, bribery, corruption, police, crime and security, access to justice, and migration.

[World Justice Project General Population Poll 2022 – Central American Survey Instrument \(English Versions A & B\)](#)

[World Justice Project General Population Poll 2022 – Central American Survey Instrument \(Spanish Versions A & B\)](#)

### VARIABLES USED IN INFOGRAPHICS ON CRIME VICTIMIZATION

This table lists the question-level variables from the General Population Poll used to construct Chart 11.1 and the “Reasons the crime was not reported” table in Chart 11.2.

[World Justice Project Crime Rates and Reporting Variable Map](#)

### VARIABLES USED IN INFOGRAPHIC ON THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

This table lists the question-level variables from the General Population Poll used to construct Chart 13.

[World Justice Project Criminal Justice System Variable Map](#)

### VARIABLES USED IN INFOGRAPHICS ON THE POLICE

This table lists the question-level variables from the General Population Poll used to construct Chart 15 and Chart 16.

[World Justice Project Police Performance Variable Map](#)

### VARIABLES USED IN INFOGRAPHIC ON PERCEPTIONS OF THE TREATMENT OF CRIME VICTIMS

This table lists the question-level variables from the General Population Poll used to construct Chart 17.

[World Justice Project Victim Support Variable Map](#)

### VARIABLES USED IN INFOGRAPHIC ON ACCESS TO JUSTICE

This table lists the question-level variables from the General Population Poll used to construct Chart 18.

[World Justice Project Access to Justice Variable Map](#)

### VARIABLES USED IN INFOGRAPHICS ON MIGRATION BY CITY

This table lists the question-level variables from the General Population Poll used to construct the “Reasons for Migration” tables in Chart 19.1 and Chart 20.2.

[World Justice Project Migration Variable Map](#)

### REGRESSION TABLES FOR REGRESSION ANALYSIS USED IN INFOGRAPHICS ON PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY AND MIGRATION

This document includes the question-level variables from the General Population Poll used in the regression analysis and the regression results featured in the following infographics: Chart 12.2 and Chart 19.2.

[World Justice Project Regression Tables](#)



**World Justice  
Project**

## ABOUT THE WORLD JUSTICE PROJECT

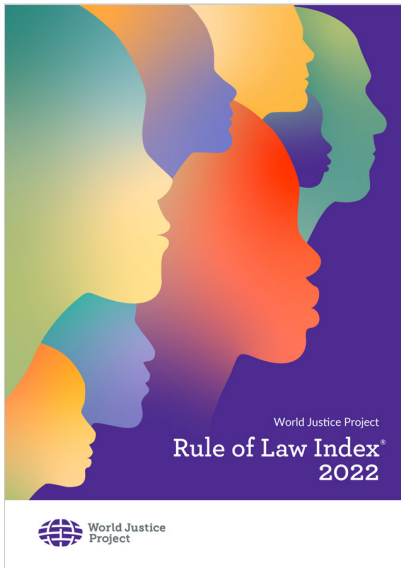
The World Justice Project (WJP) is an independent, multidisciplinary organization working to create knowledge, build awareness, and stimulate action to advance the rule of law worldwide. Effective rule of law is the foundation for communities of justice, opportunity, and peace—underpinning development, accountable government, and respect for fundamental rights.

The WJP builds and supports a global, multidisciplinary movement for the rule of law through three lines of work: collecting, organizing, and analyzing original, independent rule of law data, including the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index; supporting research, scholarship, and teaching about the importance of the rule of law, its relationship to development, and effective strategies to strengthen it; and connecting and building an engaged global network of policymakers and advocates to advance the rule of law through strategic partnerships, convenings, coordinated advocacy, and support for locally led initiatives.

Learn more at: [worldjusticeproject.org](http://worldjusticeproject.org).

# OTHER PUBLICATIONS

For more information click on the publication.



**WJP Rule of Law Index 2022**



**WJP Rule of Law Index 2022 Insights**  
Highlights and data trends from the WJP Rule of Law Index 2021



**WJP Mexico States Rule of Law Index 2020-2021**  
Perceptions and experiences in 32 states



**World Justice Challenge 2021**  
Outcome Report



**Grasping the Justice Gap 2021**



**Environmental Governance Indicators for Latin America & the Caribbean 2020**

For more information or to read these reports, visit [worldjusticeproject.org/our-work](https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work)



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