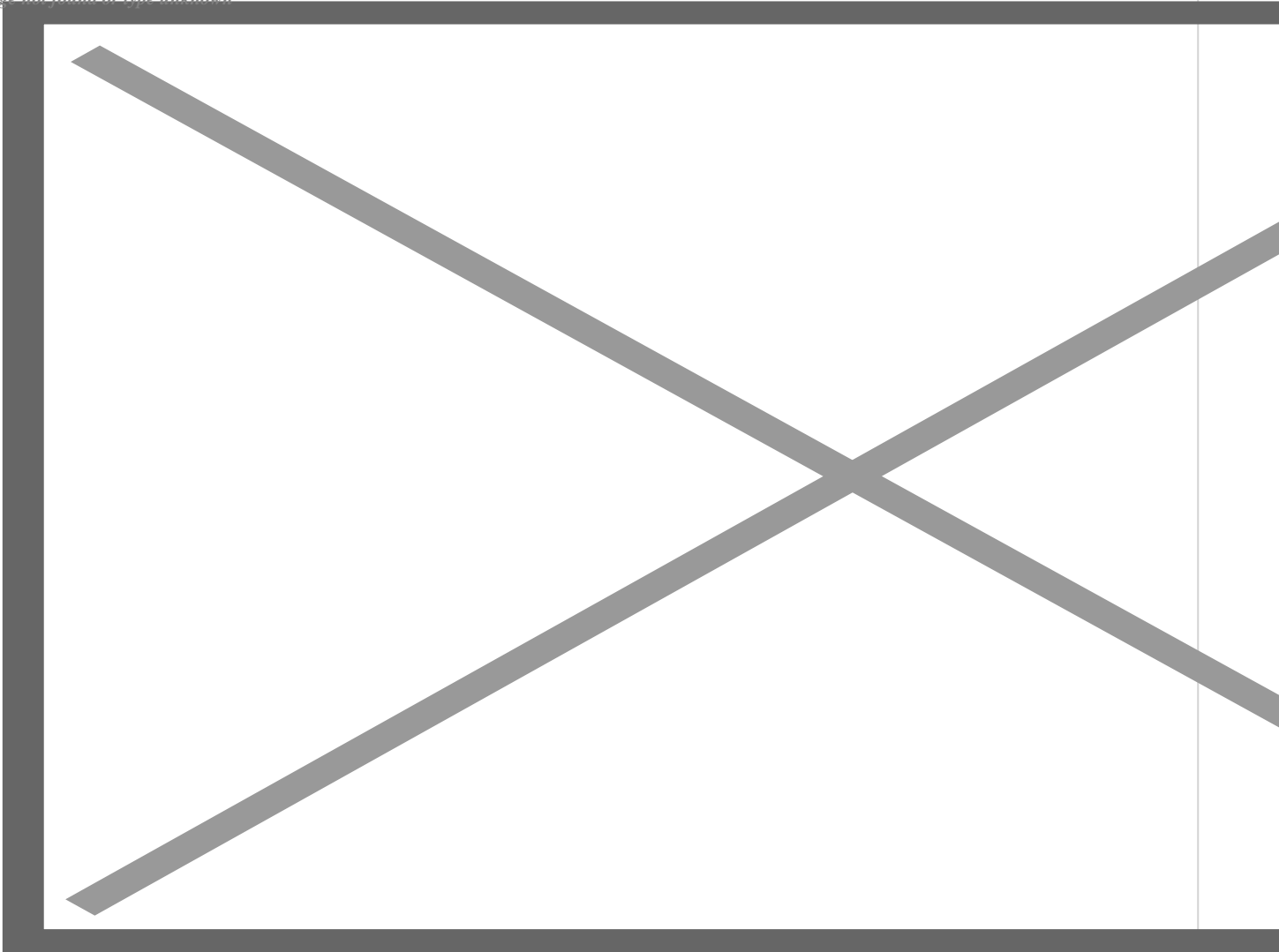


Report shows U.S. corruption at worst levels in almost a decade

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A view of the US Capitol building in Washington DC

Washington, January 31 (RHC)-- Corruption in the United States is the worst it has been in almost a decade with democratic institutions in "decay" and abuse of office "at the highest level," according to an annual global report by Transparency International.

The U.S. fell to a low of 67 out of a maximum possible score of 100 in the annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the campaign group said in its latest report. The report cited a broader decay in US political institutions as a major factor contributing to the rise of corruption levels in the country.

Scott Greytak, the group's advocacy director, said public trust in US elections has been eroded by disinformation and unprecedented amounts of untraceable money in campaigns. "Second, and increasingly important, are these series of really bombshell exposés by media outlets that are demonstrating how much dirty money is flowing into the United States' financial system," he said.

A joint investigation by BuzzFeed News and the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists last year revealed that major banks in the U.S. and elsewhere had knowingly facilitated trillions of dollars of dubious financial transactions, enabling drug kingpins and terrorists to move corrupt cash around the world.

While the U.S. was already doing badly in some areas, the Transparency International said the COVID-19 pandemic has made corruption worse in the country, raising "serious concerns" about weak oversight of coronavirus relief packages. The report cited media revelations on how loans that were issued under the Payment Protection Program and intended to shore up small businesses during the pandemic have instead flowed to big businesses, including defense contractors and international fast food chains.

"COVID-19 is not just a health and economic crisis. It's a corruption crisis. And one that we're currently failing to manage," said Delia Ferreira Rubio, who chairs Transparency International. "The past year has tested governments like no other in memory, and those with higher levels of corruption have been less able to meet the challenge," she added.

The CARES Act, a \$2.2 trillion economic stimulus bill passed by Congress and signed into law by then-President Donald Trump in March, for instance disproportionately helped millionaires thanks to a tax loophole.

The U.S. Justice Department is investigating a potential crime related to funneling money to the White House in exchange for a presidential pardon. During his tenure as president, Trump was repeatedly accused of using the office of presidency and American institutions to enrich himself and his business empire, shield his political allies from prosecution and punish his political foes.

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