
Corruption and Its Impact from Poor People's Perspective

Luis Hesneide Morales Lopez

Research Area of Despertares Consulting LHML, Nuevo Chimbote, Peru

Email address:

luis.morales.l@upch.pe

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Abstract: This article is aimed at analyzing the implications that the corruption has on society. It was addressed by the qualitative approach through a phenomenological design. For this purpose, the testimonies of 181 poor people were used, as a part of the Doctoral Thesis carried out at Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia. The participants were from the three regions of Peru: From the Human Settlements in Chimbote city (the Coast region), Juliaca (the Andes region) and Pucallpa (the Jungle region). For data collection in-depth interviews and focus group techniques were used (54 interviewees and 21 groups, respectively). The main results indicate that negative emotions such as: anger, rage, indignation, frustration, displeasure and hopelessness are typical at the time they refer all their authorities are involved in corruption. It is believed that these emotions reflect their thoughts in absolute terms, their rigid thought called dichotomous or polarized thought. It is thought that all of them irradiate to their daily life affecting their relationships and affecting the social cohesion. No main differences are found according to the place where they live, except the fact that the more educated authority the more willing to be involved in corruption, which comes, mainly, from people of Pucallpa.

Keywords: Corruption, Poverty, Society, Emotions

1. Introduction

Arteaga, points out that societies with the highest indices of perceived corruption are, at the same time, those with the greatest number of poor citizens [19]. Corruption is also attributed to other social problems such as: insecurity, unemployment, violence and poor public service provision. And according to public opinion in Latin America, politics is the one most closely linked to this phenomenon and it is largely responsible for the precarious conditions of existence in which its population live.

The assertion of Arteaga can be observed by taking a simple look at the Transparency International Report [25] on the perception of corruption, in which the country with the highest number represents the least corrupt; Denmark, 90 points; Finland, 89; Sweden, 88; Norway, 85; Netherlands, 83; Germany, 81; USA, 74; Uruguay, 71; Chile, 66; Spain and Costa Rica, 58; Brazil, 40; Panama, 38; Colombia, 37; Argentina, 36; Peru, 35; Bolivia, 33; Ecuador and Dominican Republic, 31; Mexico and Honduras, 30; Guatemala, 28; Nicaragua, 26 and Venezuela 17. It is certainly no coincidence that the least corrupt countries are precisely

those that have reached the highest levels of development. The data provided gives us with a categorical response in favor of this strong relationship.

And surveys, which appear with a certain periodicity, indicate that this phenomenon, one of the main problems in Peru and in many countries in the region [6, 16, 26], is perceived by the citizenry as a whole for the cases of judicialized corruption that make headlines in the media, including through specialized reports that refer to its impact on the countries' economies, such as those that appear in the studies [8, 7, 2].

By the other hand, little is known about approaches that allow its knowledge beyond mere quantification. Although efforts from a different perspective can be seen in the researches [1, 14]. And considering that corruption mainly impacts the most vulnerable sectors of the population, we addresses the attitudes, perceptions and feelings of people living in poverty, which are valuable elements to analyze from the perspective of the person who experiences it.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The participants were 181 inhabitants of different

educational levels, eighteen years old and older, of different levels of education, who live in economic poverty and who live in human settlements in Chimbote (coast) and Pucallpa (jungle) and in a community of Juliaca (highlands).

Table 1. Number of participants in in-depth interviews by age group, sex and location.

	Chimbote		Juliaca		Pucallpa	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
18 - 30	5	6	2	5	4	4
31 - 43	3	3	1	2	2	2
44 - 56	1	0	2	2	0	0
57 - 69	2	0	1	2	1	0
70 or older	2	0	1	0	1	0
<i>Total population</i>			54			

Table 2. Number of focus groups by age group, gender and location.

	Chimbote		Juliaca		Pucallpa	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
18 to 29 years old	1 (6)	1 (6)	2 (12)*	1 (6)	1 (6)	1 (6)
30 to 49 years old	1 (6)	2 (12)*	1 (7)	1 (6)	1 (6)	1 (6)
50 years or older	1 (6)	2 (12)*	1 (6)	1 (6)	1 (6)	1 (6)
<i>Total number</i>			21			

* Doce participantes en razón de que se formaron dos grupos focales.

Table 3. Level of instruction of the participants according to sex and place.

	Chimbote		Juliaca		Pucallpa	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Uneducated	0	0	7	6	1	0
Primary	22	26	20	18	23	20
Secondary	7	10	4	4	2	4
Higher education	2	3	1	1	0	0
<i>Total number</i>			181			

These participants were selected through a convenience sampling. In the city of Chimbote, the Human Settlement "A", where approximately 500 people live, was visited. It does not have water and sewage services, but it has electricity since 2010. In it, there is a Programa de Vaso de Leche, there. its population has various occupations: workers in fish canneries, bricklayers, welders, drivers of urban transport units, motorbike taxis (basically the young population), etc. With respect to the Human Settlement "B", where approximately 4,000 people live. It has water, electricity and sewage services since 1997. and there are four Programas de Vaso de Leche, two soup kitchens and a Programa Cuna Más.

With respect to the community of Juliaca, it is located in the district of the same name, in the province of San Roman, department of Puno. 900 people live in it. They do not have water and drainage services; they do have electricity since 1997. They also have a health center, a Programa de Vaso de Leche and an elementary school. Their adult population speak both Spanish and Quechua language, although the Quechua language is their mother tongue. They have different occupations such as: brickworker, farmers and weavers.

Regarding to the Human Settlement "C" in the city of Pucallpa, it is located in the district of Manantay, in the province of Coronel Portillo, Pucallpa. Approximately 1500 people live in it. They do not have water and drainage

services; only electricity since 2012. There is also a medical post, an elementary and high school (day and night educational services), a public pre-school, Un Programa Cuna Más, and a soup kitchen. Its population works basically in the sawmills. Others work as motorbike taxis, as small-scale fishermen and others have small businesses inside their houses.

2.2. Data Gathering Techniques

In-depth interviews and focus groups were used. The guide for these two techniques was constructed by taking into account questions that facilitated the exploration of two dimensions; the expectations of the future and the strategies used to get out of poverty.

These questions were: What did you want to be when you grew up? Why? What or who influenced you? What future expectations did you have as a child/adolescent/youth? What did you do? What happened? What expectations do you have now? How do you plan to achieve them? What have you done to achieve them? Has anyone supported or encouraged you?

Through these questions that had the purpose of obtaining valuable content regarding these dimensions, as part of the doctoral thesis defended at the Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia, the contents that served for the

elaboration of this article appeared.

2.3. Procedures

We went to the human settlements in the city of Chimbote and Pucallpa and to the community of Juliaca and contacted their authorities. All of them were informed about the study to be carried out and, at the same time, they received a document issued by the Universidad Cayetano Heredia, which contained the request for permission to dialogue with the inhabitants.

Once the permit was granted, we went to the homes that showed the greatest signs of poverty, to conduct the In-depth Interview. The person to be interviewed was the resident who claimed to be 18 or older and who answered the first call or knock on the door. His or her consent to participate was requested, using the informed consent form. After the person's authorization, the In-depth Interview was conducted, which lasted approximately sixty minutes, and it was generally conducted in an environment inside the person's home.

With regard to the Focus Groups, a list was drawn up by the authorities with the names of the poorest inhabitants, and then they were convened according to age groups in a room in the Secretary General's home (in the case of the human settlement in the cities of Chimbote and Pucallpa) and in the community premises (in the case of the community in the city of Juliaca). Each Focus Group lasted approximately ninety minutes.

It is worth mentioning that the city of Juliaca, we had the support of a psychologist from the city, who was fluent in both Spanish and Quechua language. His collaboration was considered since the population of this community was also fluent in these two languages. Thus, from the beginning, we tried to establish a good rapport between the researcher and the interviewees.

2.4. The Data Analysis

The recorded information was transcribed and then codified by creating categories, which emerged from the dimensions of analysis proposed in the methodological part (deductive coding) as well as from the testimonies of the participants (inductive coding). Finally, patterns were observed and data analysis was performed. The free software Atlas.ti, version 7.5 for Windows 9 Operating System (2015), belonging to ATLAS, was used. Ti Scientific Software Development GmbH.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The villagers were asked for informed consent. Their free participation in the study was guaranteed at all times. The interviews were recorded, with the prior authorization of the participants, and then transcribed, seeking maximum fidelity. The researcher is the only one who had access to the recordings. The transcripts did not contain any personal information. They were identified with codes. The information collected was for study purposes and it was

confidential.

3. Results and Discussion

One of the aspects that easily comes to light is those ones related to the unpleasant emotions. They narrate their experience with respect to their rulers, to whom they attribute managements linked to corruption and illicit enrichment.

"[...] my dad supported the president and what happened. Everyone steals, even if they say no, everyone steals. My mom likes politics, but I don't believe in it, it's a dirty business [...] they come here, they give us a soda, a cup and something like that, for you to vote for them, and when they win the elections they forget about it, they ignore us [...]" (Focus group - women 18-29 years old, Chimbote).

The expressions of hatred are evident when they give opinion about the main political actors, which is evident in the testimony of the young woman from the city of Chimbote, who indicates that politics is a dirty business. Furthermore, she emphasizes a common and improper procedure of certain politicians that is punishable, according to the Law of Political Organizations, to grant or promise gifts to citizens directly or indirectly in the framework of the election campaign [12].

The perception of hopelessness and the impossibility of change also comes out in these people, which would have been formed by the continuous disappointment towards the politicians who do not fulfill their electoral promises.

"They profit, they benefit themselves, they promise and then equal. Nothing changes. They all promise, they fill up with money and imagine, how the poor man lives. Promises and promises and no more than that. We pay for public light, we pay for everything. We poor people pay so that they can get rich and this shouldn't be the case. (Focus group - women 30-49 years old, Chimbote).

They promise but do not deliver. It will be same in these elections. I know that they will never change. Just promises, no more than that..." "[...], everyone, without exception, is for their own pocket, everyone is like that..." (Focus group - men 50 years and older, Juliaca).

Low efficiency in public management and the appropriation of state assets by politicians are also recurrent perceptions in these populations. In addition, it should be noted that their testimonies regarding corruption reflect their thoughts in absolute terms, without taking into account intermediate levels: "Nothing changes. Everyone promises", "I know they will never change", "Everyone, without exception, is for their own pocket". "All of them are like that, without exception".

It is considered that this rigid thought, called dichotomous or polarized thought, gives rise to intense emotions and provokes the exaltation of the spirit, which are precisely reflected in their words, which can be harmful because they lead to despair and fatalism. For them, there is simply no possibility that the situation might improve and, in this sense, it is believed that much of the social and political upheaval could be gestated under this type of thinking.

On the other hand, one aspect that attracts a lot of attention is the perception that education and academic degrees are, in no way, an impediment to the emergence of corrupt behavior; indeed, according to their testimonies, this higher level of education may even favor the emergence of corrupt behavior. It is as they thought "the more education a person has, the more corrupt is".

"I along with my little friends used to touch things that didn't belong to us. I remember that I used to bring my wife her household appliances. But the truth is that everyone does it. Those from the high society, with higher education are the worst. The politicians, uff, they are all corrupt and they are not punished".

(Focus group - men 50 years and older, Chimbote).

"[...] here is a congressman. He was elected with a very big majority of votes [...] and he was criticised because of his low level of education. I remember some of his political opponents used to call him illiterate that he is no longer good for anything, that he doesn't have the capacity to perform as a congressman and things like that. [...] But those ones who have higher education are the worst, you know, the easiest way to get money is by politics [...]"

(Focus group - men aged 50 and older, Pucallpa).

Both participants allude to the fact that corruption is more linked to those ones with more years of schooling. According to them, the professionals are more likely to fall into these illicit acts because of their influence on the society. And because of their money they evade justice and they are not penalized. Their arguments would take away a broad notion that educational institutions do not educate the young in values, but rather constitute a mere education in knowledge and skills. It is obvious to mention that many elements come into play in this formation. However, they emphasize that educational institutions do not educate the person in this aspect.

However, the most worrying- more devastating even than the rejection and mistrust towards their rulers- is that these perceptions of mistrust spread throughout the whole social environment. In other words, the impact of political corruption goes beyond simply pointing the finger at this or that authority, but rather it breaks the overall social trust of a society. This is demonstrated by Richey (2010) [18], in his study based on comparative politics and criminology; an increase in government corruption indexes leads to a deterioration of trust in our fellow human beings, a decrease in interpersonal trust.

"When my husband gets a job as a plasterer, which pays well, I take advantage of it buying my pills and food. Paying my light and water bills. Here there are soup kitchens, but I don't receive benefits from them. The ones who are in charge of their management are the only ones who get benefit. Only for them, only for them. [...] The Government is helping people in need by Techo Propio, building our houses, but I can't get benefit from it because I don't have the ownership title. The coordinator responsible of the ownership titles doesn't manage promptly and properly. He does nothing, just asking for

our money, I am sure everything is for his own pocket only. I am not the only one. Seventeen of us have no ownership title yet [...] (Focus group - women aged 50 and over, Chimbote).

Seligson (2002) [22], points out that corruption in Latin America destroys the interpersonal trust of citizens. Stulhofer (2004) [23] indicates that the perception of corruption in Croatia is associated with a decline in trust in individuals. Rothstein and Eek (2006) [20] point out that when people perceive misconduct on the part of their authorities, the impact on them is not only a loss of credibility with those authorities, but that mistrust radiates out to people, attributing that people in general are untrustworthy.

On the other hand, the social environment can alter our honesty as a value. In this regard, Kaufmann, Kraay & Mastruzzi (2011) [11] point out that if the lack of truth is a recurrent issue and it is not punished in a society, then people will consider it as though it were normal and even justifiable, without being their self-concept of honest people threatened. In this sense, Tabellini (2008) also contributes; experiencing frequent injustices, which is an inevitable by-product of the lack of truth, leads to a rise in dishonest behavior.

"[...] Little by little I realized that things were not going in the right direction. So, I started working at EDYFICAR program, in the Mi Barrio program. But before that, I had scammed a lady out of her money. With this amount - a thousand soles- I had bought an old motorcycle [...]"

(Focus group - men 50 years and older, Chimbote).

There is also evidence that economic systems, institutions and corporate culture shape people's ethical values [13, 24] and they can also impact the value of people's honesty [9, 15]. Gorodnichenko & Roland (2011) point out that ethical values, including honesty, are transmitted from people who are recognized from peers and from parents. People often take individuals with high social status such as successful entrepreneurs and celebrities as role models. The practice of dishonest behavior by them can be a very bad example for dishonest behavior to occur. Similarly, if politicians set a bad example by committing election fraud, nepotism, embezzlement, then the honesty of citizens may suffer because corruption is thus encouraged in a wide sector of society [10].

Therefore, the feeling that the institutions and leaders who lead our country are immersed in very serious acts of corruption, the high disapproval of Congress by the citizens, the recent journalistic reports on corruption at all levels not only circumscribes the mistrust to that environment but its scope encompasses the very interpersonal relationships.

What about the anomalous behavior that is continually occurring in our country? What about those drivers who ignore traffic regulations? What about the passers-by who drive down the streets and avenues not respecting even the traffic light signals? What about the thunderous sound of horns and car horns generating noise pollution in the cities? What about the street sellers invading streets of the cities? What about the public sector doctors who abandon their duty to attend private consultations? The situations seem to have

no end.

On the other hand, it is of great importance to highlight an argument that emerges in certain people every time they refer to stories related to criminal acts and in which they have been the protagonists, perhaps, it, in some way, alleviates their guilt of having broken the law by stating that they are not the only ones who fall into these illegal acts.

"I had some friends who used to live by robbery, by steal. So did I. So did I. But the truth is that everyone does it. The politicians, especially. All of them, without exception. I remember that I used to bring my wife her appliances that she needed at home just by robbing, just by stealing". (Focus group - men 50 years and older, Chimbote).

The discredit of the political class can be seen in these perceptions, which automatically lead us to the idea this malpractice of public officials ignites and fuels citizens' illicit behavior. That would be like they saying: "If they do it, why not me? This generates a whole dissocial and anarchic culture which lead us to the misery in which anything goes. In other words, the effect of rewarding the corrupt and the fact that their illegal acts go unpunished has devastating results on the social fabric of which we are a part. And what will be the impact on society when judges make unfair decisions? Aren't these behaviors fueling criminality?"

This reality leads us to believe that corruption is one of the main factors that maintain criminal behavior in a society. And, indeed, there is sufficient material about it. Gächter & Schulz (2016) [5], for example, assert that political corruption generates higher crime rates. Other studies add to this finding [3, 4]

In this regard, the Peruvian government considered a frontal fight to eradicate it because it is conceived as unsustainable to build the country. The declaration of 2019 as the "Year of the Fight against Corruption and Impunity" symbolized this desire to put an end to this phenomenon that affects society as a whole.

Given all above, it was incomprehensible and it called attention the criticism to the government for its lack of governability; "President Vizcarra should dedicate himself to governing" [17], "Vizcarra must permit Congress to work and dedicate himself to governing" [21].

All of these statements carried with them the perception that the government was incapable of governing, that the government did not attend to the real needs of the population, such as the serious problem of citizen security. And it was clear that the authors of these phrases could not conceive, or did not want to realize, for some reason, that corruption in our country is the cause of countless calamities and that this is, by all accounts, the core of many problems, so they overlooked it and highlighted other problems, which, in the end, are the inescapable result of corruption itself.

4. Conclusions

The emotion of displeasure emerges with notoriety among the inhabitants every time they attribute actions linked to corruption, illicit enrichment and inefficient management of

their authorities. According to their perspective, this dismal reality does not seem to be changing, so the feeling of hopelessness is inside of them emerging the absolute thinking from them while talking. All-or-nothing thinking come into play and is it is believed that this type of absolute thinking, also called dichotomous thinking, can lead to an inability to see the alternatives in a situation or solutions to a problem. In this sense much of the social upheavals, much of the social unrests are believed to be due to this type of thinking.

In addition, some inhabitants have the idea that corrupt behavior is mostly manifested in those who have a higher level of education; "those who are more educated, those who are more elegant and well dressed, are the most coimeros"; as they often say in their stories.

In addition, the high level of rejection and distrust they have of their authorities, because they attribute to them responsibility for actions linked to corruption, would spread to their immediate environment, affecting the credibility among the citizens themselves, which in turn would break social cohesion.

On the other hand, acts of corruption and illicit enrichment in which certain authorities are involved would represent for individuals "a certain relief that lightens the burden of guilt" when they themselves are the protagonists of illicit acts. Expressions such as: If those one from the upper class also steal, if even the president steals, the authorities are the first ones to steal, etc., would meet this hypothesis, which in turn is interpreted as saying that this malpractice by public officials would be provoking dissocial behavior in the citizenry, would be producing uncivil behaviors breaking the codes of coexistence, as if anything goes and nothing matters, to such an extent that society as a whole becomes chaotic and unstoppable.

By the other hand, according to the regions addressed, no major differences have been found, except for the one related to the perception that "Those with more education are the most corrupt ones," which is attributed solely by the inhabitants of the city of Pucallpa.

Finally, we firmly believe that this article can serve as a starting point of a line of research aiming at analyzing the impact the corruption has on people's attitudes, feelings and behavior. So, through this, we could acquire a deeper understanding of the chaotic situation that exists in many of our countries.

Declaration

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