

Chapter 9

The Phenomenon of Corruption and Its Impact on the Loss of Social Cohesion in Colombia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the impact of corruption on the loss of social cohesion in Colombia. To this end, a tour is made throughout some events that have meant economic and social costs for the country and that have had a negative impact on the credibility of institutions, on the increase of inequality and poverty and on the gradual configuration of an anomic state. Likewise, this chapter deals with the ethical implications of corrupt practices, as well as with the way in which a proper ethical education can contribute to the restoration of trust and the strengthening of the social fabric. It is concluded, among other aspects, that corruption, particularly in Colombia, has fragmented the social fabric and has contributed to worsening poverty rates, hunger, lack of employment, and the low levels of both education and health.

INTRODUCTION

Although corruption is not a new phenomenon¹, in recent years it has had a negative and significant impact on all levels of society. This is related to the consolidation of global information networks at the service of people around the world. This fact has allowed greater interaction between different role players, who, from their own hierarchy of influence, develop communication processes that, although asymmetrical, have enabled the media and the public opinion to deploy more quickly all actions contrary to the establishment. In this way, many more acts of corruption are currently known than those known 20 or 30 years ago. In fact, the first act of corruption identified, in addition to those generated by groups

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outside the law to put pressure on civil population and sustain the war that put all levels of Colombian society on tenterhooks, was the so-called “8,000 process” in 1998. This was a trial in which the presence of drug money in the presidential and legislative elections was judged (Commission for the Truth, 2022). Subsequently, more than 300 major cases of corruption have fundamentally permeated the social and political life in Colombia.

For this reason, the purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the impact of corruption on the loss of social cohesion in Colombia. It is oriented to the ways in which corrupt practices, understood as “a web of social relationships conditioned by asymmetries of power involving a set of players and institutions that perform a specific role” (Gilli, J. J., 2014, p. 46), have fragmented society to the point of reducing the growth rate of countries; discouraging investment; altering the composition and effectiveness of public spending; reducing tax collection and having a negative impact on the distribution of land and wealth (Angadoña, 2007). Likewise, corruption damages the legitimacy of public institutions; it calls into question the rights to equality and justice and is responsible for many of the ills that afflict many countries worldwide, such as poverty, hunger, lack of employment and low levels of education and health (Briochi, 2010).

In order to achieve the objective proposed, the chapter is divided into the following sections: Corruption in Colombia. Some cases; corruption in the configuration of anomic states; ethical perspectives on the phenomenon of corruption and the trust on the strengthening of the social fabric.

CORRUPTION IN COLOMBIA. SOME CASES

This section takes a tour throughout the facts of some of the most relevant cases of corruption that occurred in the country in recent years. These facts have generated a negative impact on the legitimacy and governability of the country, have contributed to the increase in social gaps and the weakening of the public sector and have had a negative impact on employment, education, and health. The selection was based on all acts of corruption that were reported to the General Attorney’s Office in Colombia between 2018 and 2022 and that after investigating the case, actors were found guilty, and sentence was given (Table 1).

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