Research Article

Corruption in Mexico and Vaccine Refusal

Atalia Eureka Putri Taju and Kholifatus Saadah*

Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Sciences, Universitas Jenderal Soedirman

ORCID
Kholifatus Saadah: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7341-9932

Abstract.
Mexico has a history of power struggles and a culture of bad governance. Corruption in Mexico is deeply rooted and very difficult to deal with. This culture is fully supported by most politicians and people in various sectors. Mexico is trapped in a long-term case of corruption that has become a political system normalized by its citizens. This article explores the dynamics of corruption cases in Latin America. This article explains the level of corruption, the type of corruption, and its causes. Corruption continues to run rampant because people live in accordance with it. The best solution to overcome this problem is to overthrow the regime. Mexico's anti-corruption law has been ineffective. Furthermore, high corruption has built distrust in the society, which makes the refusal of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Keywords: corruption, Mexico, culture, Latin America

Corresponding Author:
Kholifatus Saadah; email:
kholifatus.saadah@unsoed.ac.id

1. Introduction

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary's definition, corruption is dishonest or illegal behavior by powerful people or people who have higher power than others. It also means persuasion to violate applicable laws [1]. The United Nations (UN) as an international institution include corruption in the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). UNDOC states that corruption is a crime that undermines democracy, slows economic growth, and creates instability for the government [2]. This statement is also supported by a statement from Interpol, which confirms that the long-term effects of corruption will have a destructive impact on countries, especially developing countries [3]. There are many impacts caused by corruption, such as a damaged economic system in the country, low value of foreign investment and trade, impaired quality of education and health, and the threat of poverty that causes social welfare [4]. As Founder and Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum at the annual meeting in 2019, Klaus Schwab stated that many new economic models would be adopted to fight corruption.

How to cite this article: Atalia Eureka Putri Taju and Kholifatus Saadah*, (2023), "Corruption in Mexico and Vaccine Refusal" in *International Conference on Politics, Social, and Humanities Sciences*, KnE Social Sciences, pages 11–21. DOI 10.18502/kss.v8i3.12812

Page 11

This case has been central to the WEF's work, and in 2004 WEF formed the Partnering Against Corruption Initiative (PACI) [5].

Corruption occurs in many developing countries, especially those still struggling to find their country's most appropriate political system. Coupled with unfavorable historical factors such as power struggles, intervention by foreign countries, and new democracies, the government system may be unstable. When talking about the Latin American region, what comes to mind is how countries in this region struggle to achieve economic, political, and social stability. The wider community's struggle is trying to carry out until the government is close to social movements. For example, let us see Mexico. There was an uprising, mostly by peasants, who demanded guarantees for the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples and women and the democratization of the Mexican political system [6].

People fight for political changes by violence or non-violence. The revolution in Mexico was aimed at 'overthrowing the state' and the ruling government. However, the form of action of 'overthrowing the state' does not only come from external factors. This kind of action can occur within the government. Ultimately, the background of Mexico becomes an interesting discussion for the authors because corruption cases in Mexico are so deeply rooted and entrenched that they can be known as a culture or famous legends that must be known.

Corruption cases around the world can be observed and their level seen through the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), which is the main indicator to see the condition of corruption in the public sector. In this case, Mexico is ranked 124th out of 180 countries with a score of 31 out of 100 in 2021. The Global Corruption Barometer (GCB), as the largest and most detailed media survey containing public views on corruption cases in Latin America and the Caribbean, also explained that 44% of the public Mexico considers corruption to increase throughout 2019 and users of public services commit bribes throughout 2019 [7]. Therefore, this case study is important to discuss and can also prove that Mexico is a form of the depiction of the instability that occurs in Latin America.

2. Method

This article uses secondary data collection from online articles, journals, books, and official publications from the government, credible institutions, and online media following the topics raised. The author uses a descriptive method to explain the selected

phenomenon or case study using a theoretical basis related to the overall topic selection.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Corruption Case in Mexico

"El que no tranza [tranza], no avanza" -Mexican saying

The quote above is a mass perception that the Mexican people believe. It can be interpreted as 'if you are not cheating, you are not trying" or "if you do not take advantage of everything, you will never get great things" [8]. Cases of corruption in Mexico occur from time to time and are deeply rooted, so it becomes a culture; as Lola Romanucci Ross and the popular magazine Contenido said in the 1970s. Corruption is the number one problem in Mexico; corruption exists at all levels of society and affects any formal position in government [9]. The narratives that emerge from the internals of the Mexican state are enough to illustrate how people live side by side with corruption, even if it is considered normal. Academics and practitioners have begun to pay attention to the dynamics in Mexico, which has also attracted the attention of people in the Latin American region and the international community. Scientific analysis of this phenomenon has been followed by the emergence of anecdotes, official reports, surveys, and other news that increasingly show the actual condition of corruption in Mexico [10]. The dynamics in Latin America, especially in Mexico, are a form of fluctuating conditions that countries have experienced for decades. First, however, the authors will discuss the culture of corruption.

3.2. Corruption Culture

The culture of corruption is described as a relationship between two interrelated variables, culture, and corruption. Morris [11], in his article, "Corruption and Mexican Political Culture," said that this culture of corruption is the result -not the cause- of the many year's deep-rooted corruption cases in government. Rooted here can be interpreted as an action that has been ingrained for a long time and is carried out continuously in every aspect of politics and government. Another factor is the government that provides regulations as an attribute of the culture. Unfortunately, the regulations that were made did not even reduce the occurrence of corruption but instead perpetuated the existence of these activities.

In his writings, Morris also mentioned the impact of corruption on civil and government relations, such as weakening trust in public institutions, weakening the level of trust between individuals in the community and government, reducing the legitimacy of the regime in power, also weakening civic involvement or public participation. As Gerald Caiden said [12] in Corruption and Democracy, "Every incident of corruption that comes to light, and the seeming inability or indifference of public leaders and institutions to correct it, disillusions people and serves to undermine their leader's credibility". Other impacts such as increasing public distrust and reducing regime legitimacy have also been proven by the findings of Seligson [13] 2002 in the governments of Bolivia, Paraguay, El Salvador, and Nicaragua. This entrenched corruption, sooner or later will disrupt the country's stability.

3.3. Corruption Culture in Mexico

The same thing happened in Mexico. This terrible popular culture is also a concern for a more in-depth study. Transparency International's 2005 Global Corruption Barometer [14] explains that 31% of households in Mexico pay bribes during the year. The state is also involved in bribery cases, around 9-12% of the country's Gross Domestic Product or GDP. Other surveys in 2001, such as the Encuesta Nacional de la Cultural Politica or ENCUP, also asked about corruption cases which were the most common answers from the public, as they were used to it. Thus, a narrative emerged that corruption is not a characteristic of Mexico's system of government or society. However, corruption is the system and is even said to be a national sport. In his article, "Political Corruption in Mexico: The Impact of Democratization," Morris describes the causes of corruption in the country. Structurally there are social forces that dominate, that is, a political party called the Partido Revolucionario Institucional or PRI, which makes many rules or policies of authoritarian government that encourage corruption which also perpetuates the ruling regime. The first Mexican president after World War II ended, and the person who changed the name of the dominant political party to the PRI, Miguel Aleman, is a man with a corrupt image. Mexico's economic development, which was seen as significant after World War II, could not be separated from Aleman's "dirty" role in gaining profits, so the image of corruptors was quite closely attached to him and the dominant party [15].

The rules made by the PRI regime will eventually be followed by other actions that protect the culture of corruption, such as rewarding those who obey the rules of the

game, punishing those who oppose the rules, and co-opting those who have the potential to threaten the sustainability of the system. The people in power carry out lawsuits and anti-corruption campaigns, which are also closely related to social cleansing actions among politicians. They also accuse their political enemies of corruption of continuing to gain leadership positions and legitimacy from society. The condition makes the people see that their leader will be there, bringing new ideas and good things for the country, and public trust will increase amid deceit built by the government. The government is trying to win the people's hearts so that this corruption under the guise of leadership can continue to be implemented. According to data or findings compiled from Morris's writings about Mexico, there is evidence that shows the culture of corruption in Mexico continues:

3.3.1. Level of Corruption

The level of corruption is a measure that is seen according to the actual situation in society. Corruption is not a phenomenon that is easy to measure because it is a social issue that is quite abstract and diverse, so tracking cases also takes time. The tool to measure the level of cases that many people use surveys which mainly depend on respondents' perceptions about the level of corruption. According to a survey in Mexico, 70% of respondents said that many political or government people commit corruption, and more than 85% of respondents in Mexico City agreed that corruption is widespread [16].

In the private sector, 39% of respondents stated that the business they run makes payments to influence the content of policy rules such as laws (a certain budget of their business is used for this). Another 62% say that there are also payments to low-level officials (based on data from EGDE or Encuesta de Gobernabilidad y Desarrollo Empresarial in 2001, which 3,985 representatives of private companies filled out). Others said that the level of corruption is even higher than the level of public participation. However, as the respondent, the Mexican society also acknowledged that bribery and corruption were needed to deal with problems in society because it was complicated to comply with the applicable law, so there was no other way than corruption [17].

This condition clearly illustrates that society sees corruption as a regular thing. Especially for those involved in practical politics, for example, are indeed very close to the culture of corruption itself. Moreover, several parties from the community also consider that if they do not take actions that lead to corruption, such as providing facilitation payments or bribing officials, their activities can be hampered. This argument

indeed encourages the community to continue to perpetuate these activities. If they are faced with the choice to pay so that their activities, especially those related to government, can be faster than the usual process, which can take a very long time, there is a tendency to pay higher. Public affairs to the government are usually related to administrative matters. If it takes a long time, it will provide many losses for the community.

3.3.2. Types and Location of Corruption

When compared between the state at the top and society at the bottom, the perception of corruption in Mexico is more prominent at the state or government level. The government scored 8.0 in 2002 on a scale of 0-10 for the level of corruption. In comparison, the public scored 6.2 in the same year for the level of corruption (according to Reforma Folls). Respondents will say similar things in the origin; some are from the government, and some are from society [18]. Sources or involvement of money in corruption came from federal money by 49% and 22% private money; others answered that both had the same amount.

According to the survey, the level of corruption in the location of the respondents' choice consists of 4 types: 35% at the federal level, 22% at the state level, 13% at the local level, and the remaining 26% answered that all are the same at any level. If viewed by institution, ten institutions carried out high-level corruption cases, namely Police 8.29%, Diputados 7.83%, Political Parties 7.71%, City Government 7.53%, State Government 7.42%, Public Officials 7.33%, Judges 7.16%, Empresarios 6.12 %, President 5.45%, and Army 5.02%.

The groups identified to influence corruption are drug dealers, organized crime networks, multinational companies, national businesses, and trade unions [19]. The most prevalent corruption in Mexico is in government or bureaucratic activities, such as the public having to pay money to obtain services from the government. The ENCBG also shows that 50% of bribery cases are related to traffic-related car taking, traffic fines, and offenses.

From the presentation of the data above, it can be said that the scope of government is a fertile field for corruption itself. Coupled with the condition of many party circles consisting of people from the same party, the tendency to protect each other is very high. For this reason, it is difficult for parties who want to eradicate corruption because the roots of corruption are deeply embedded in the government.

3.3.3. Causes of Corruption

There is a tendency to see corruption created by the government and the applicable laws or regulations. 77% of respondents in Mexico City agree that corruption is rampant because the guilty do not get the punishment they deserve [20]. So, the opportunity to commit corruption is getting more prominent due to the absence of fear of small risks. Others said and agreed that the existing laws, regulations, and legal norms were not yet capable of being a preventive and repressive measure in fighting corruption and providing a deterrent effect. Society acknowledged that culture was the cause of all this, but the mistake was on the society itself because they were preserving a culture that should have been destroyed. The value of this culture is 0 or cannot be justified.

Weak laws are almost always a strong reason why corruption takes root. The perpetrators did not feel the deterrent effect because of the light sentence. Plus, the circle of relationships between members of government agencies that are not healthy can illustrate that committing corruption will make you more prosperous, and the punishment will not make you poorer.

3.4. Efforts to Fight Against Corruption in Mexico

Mexico is trying to implement an anti-corruption movement. This activity consists of anti-corruption initiatives that will focus on culture and people and increase social organizations' involvement in the fight against corruption. This argument is based on the view that morals, ethics, and community involvement are essential to fight corruption [21]. The journey to democratization also helped Mexico fight corruption as the PAN leader was able to overthrow the PRI leadership and win the people's trust. It seems that the people are very tired of this long cultural journey and the victory of Vicente Fox from PAN brought a bright path from authoritarianism to democracy and corruption to stability. Currently, Mexico has anti-corruption laws, but they are never enforced, and public officials are rarely held accountable for illegal acts or actions perceived by the public. The anti-corruption law was passed in 2017, but its effectiveness has not been proven yet [22]. Consolidating democracy may be one solution to combating the culture of corruption in Mexico. However, Mexico's decade-long democratization efforts have reached a dead end because the PRI is still the dominant party. PRI directly shows that it is a manifestation of neo-authoritarian who continues to dominate the running of the government system in a country [23].

The domination of one party has always been an obstacle to the democratic mechanism in certain countries. It could have happened because if there is only one dominant party, the opportunity to carry out a check and balance mechanism between party members within the government will be small. In theory, if the degree of democracy is high, the public can choose representatives far from corruption cases and make parliament and government thresholds ideal [24]. Unfortunately, not only Mexico, many examples of countries under one dominant party tend to have a high corruption index, such as several countries in Sub-Saharan. Marin concludes in his writings that countries with one dominant party and, in the process, do not have perfect party competition tend to have high levels of corruption. This condition can be explained when compared to a country with solid inter-party competition, as long as there is no collusion between parties, there is no agreed bureaucracy between parties, and there is not too much fragmentation between parties.

3.5. Society Response: Distrust

The outbreak of Covid-19 to become a global pandemic has also affected Mexico. Just like other countries, the Mexican government also runs a vaccinatio results were not as expected by the government. Mexicans say they don't believe in Covid-19, let alone vaccinations. In the Chiapas region, for example. The region known for its Zapatista uprising since 1994 considers Covid-19 non-existent, a fact stated by Pascuala, health leader for 364 communities in Mexico [25]. In addition, the people of Chiapas and some indigenous groups in Mexico consider the government this can only commit corruption because they never listen to input from indigenous peoples in running the government. Distrust of the government is exacerbated by the culture of indigenous Mexicans, who trust the words of elders more than government directives. One of the cities that consists of indigenous peoples and has an autonomous government model is Aldama. Adolfo Victorio López Gómez, mayor of Aldama, stated that his residents prefer to use traditional medicines, which have been verified by elders in the area [26].

The rejection and hesitancy of the vaccine itself is predictable, given that Mexican society can be categorized as a marginal society. This is because marginalized people perceive that something that comes from the outside and is new, does not necessarily match what has existed so far in the community [27]. From the news quotes taken by the author, it can be seen how the people not only don't trust the government because of the very high corruption cases, they also trust their elders more than the government's directives. Echanove-Chueva et al. explained through his research using

the Vaccine Hesitancy Determinants Matrix (VHDM) method to check the Mexican public's perception of the Covid-19 vaccine [28]. The results show that the highest reason Mexicans have doubts about vaccines is due to their distrust of the healthcare system. The results of this research also supported by the fact presented by Ozawa and Stack that public hesitancy regarding vaccines have existed since the chicken pox vaccine was given to the wider community since the 1800s [29].

4. Conclusion

Latin America is a region dominated by developing countries that still have many challenges in their governance system, as experienced by Mexico. As one of the countries with a better economy compared to other countries in the region, Mexico cannot escape a culture of corruption. According to the survey, many Mexicans are skeptical of solving corruption cases because no punishment deters the perpetrators. Moreover, the weak legal system and pressure from the dominant party make it challenging to punish perpetrators from certain parties. If there are still many perpetrators from the dominant party in control, it will not be easy to eradicate from the root.

Conflict of Interest

The authors whose names are listed immediately below the title, certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

Acknowledgment

References

[1] Merriam-Webster. Definition of CORRUPTION [Internet]. Merriam-webster.com. 2019. Available from: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/corruption

[2] Kamberska, N. UNODC and corruption [Internet]. Unodc.org. 2019. Available from: https://www.unodc.org/unodc/corruption/

[3] Corruption [Internet]. Interpol.int. 2017. Available from: https://www.interpol.int/en/Crimes/Corruption

[4] Mirzayev E. The Economic and Social Effects of Corruption [Internet]. Investopedia. 2021. Available from: https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/012215/how-corruption-affects-emerging-economies.asp

[5] Fleming S. How bad is the global corruption problem? [Internet]. World Economic Forum. 2019. Available from: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/12/corruption-global-problem-statistics-cost/

[6] Godelmann IR. The Zapatista Movement: The Fight for Indigenous Rights in Mexico - Australian Institute of International Affairs [Internet]. Australian Institute of International Affairs. 2014. Available from: https://www.internationalaffairs.org.au/news-item/the-zapatista-movement-the-fight-for-indigenous-rights-in-mexico/

[7] Transparency International. Mexico [Internet]. Transparency.org. 2020. Available from: https://www.transparency.org/en/countries/mexico

[8] el que no transa no avanza - WordSense Dictionary [Internet]. www.wordsense.eu. [cited on 11 September 2022]. Available from: https://www.wordsense.eu/el_que_no_transa_no_avanza/

[9] Morris SD. Corruption and the Mexican political system: continuity and change. Third World Q. 1999 Jun;20(3):623–43.

[10] Morris SD. Political corruption in Mexico: The impact of democratization. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers; 2009. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781626370869.

[11] Caiden GE, Dwivedi OP, Jabbra JG, et al. Where corruption lives. Bloomfield (CT): Kumarian Press; 2001.

[12] Seligson MA. The Impact of Corruption on Regime Legitimacy: A Comparative Study of Four Latin American Countries. J Polit. 2002 May;64(2):408–33.

[13] Global Corruption Barometer - 2005 [Internet]. Transparency.org. [cited 2023 Jan 3]. Available from: https://www.transparency.org/en/gcb/global/global-corruption-barometer-2005

[14] Skidmore TE, Smith PH. Modern latin america. Oxford University Press; 2005.

[15] Mexicana T. Encuesta Nacional de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno-2001.

[16] Gutiérrez Vivó J. El otro yo del mexicano. México: Océano; 1998.

[17] Caiden GE, Dwivedi OP, Jabbra JG, et al. Where corruption lives. Bloomfield (CT): Kumarian Press; 2001.

[18] GAN Integrity. Mexico Corruption Report [Internet]. GAN Integrity. 2018. Available from: https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/mexico/

[19] Covid: The Mexican villages refusing to vaccinate. BBC News [Internet]. 2021 Jul 20; Available from: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-57893466

[20] Romo R. Whole towns are refusing Covid-19 vaccines in Mexico [Internet]. CNN. 2021. Available from: https://edition.cnn.com/2021/03/02/americas/mexican-indigenous-communities-covid-19-vaccine-intl-latam/index.html

[21] Madorsky TZ, Adebayo NA, Post SL, O'Brian CA, Simon MA. Vaccine distrust: A predictable response to structural racism and an inadequate public health infrastructure. Am J Public Health. 2021 Oct;111 S3:S185–8.

[22] Echánove-Cuevas DA, Mejía-Domínguez NR, Castañeda-Sortibrán AN. Is Mexico's population hesitant towards COVID-19 vaccines? A 2021 survey on different levels of hesitancy and its determinants. SSM Popul Health. 2022 Sep;19:101207.

[23] Ozawa S, Stack ML. Public trust and vaccine acceptance—international perspectives. Hum Vaccin Immunother. 2013 Aug;9(8):1774–8.