

## Are women really less corrupt than man? An insight from theory and empirics on gender and corruption

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### Abstract

There are different theories being offered to explain why women are less corrupt than men. These explanations include psychology/biology/experiential realities, opportunity/network, corrupt incentive, culture, risk aversion, resistance towards corruption, institutional context and gender dynamics. Based on extensive literature survey, paper presented various dimensions of the relationship and identifies discernible factors highlighting observed behaviour.

**Keywords:** Corruption, women and corruption, Gender and Corruption

### 1. Introduction

Today, corruption has emerged as a major hurdle in the path of prosperity and well-being of the nations across the globe. It challenges good governance and undermines state authority and rule of law. It disturb moral and social fabricates of the society as well as social and economic stability. Research has shown that corruption is one of the most detrimental factors afflicting the economies of developing countries. It further undercuts various dimensions of human wellbeing such as health, access to clean water, and education, as well as negatively affecting subjective dimensions of life such as self-reported well-being and happiness (Halleröd *et al.* 2012; Holmberg and Rothstein 2012; Swaroop and Rajkumar 2002; Treisman 2007) <sup>[13, 14, 29, 31]</sup>. When opportunities to abuse power for self-interest are widespread, inequalities may become reinforced and democratic and economic development will be undermined. Though, societies differ in the extent, perception and incidence of corruption, yet very little is known for sure about what causes corruption to be higher in one place than another. Size of the government, federal structures, openness to international trade, stage of economic development, political institutions and public policy have been considered the factors causing variations across nations. But fifteen years back two seminal papers Dollar *et al.* (2001) <sup>[6]</sup> and Swamy *et al.* (2001) <sup>[28]</sup> provided a new dimension to the study of corruption. Both articles argued for a gendered understanding of the problem of corruption and claimed that women, on average, are less likely to engage in corrupt activities compared to men. This has promoted World Bank (2001) <sup>[39]</sup> to recommend inclusion of women in political sphere as an instrument to control corruption and to promote good governance. Since then, the literature on gender and corruption has increased manifold with arguments that increased women participation would reduce corruption and equally forceful counter arguments terming it either just a wishful thinking or a matter of chance. The literature on the subject is still growing. The present paper carries out a detailed literature survey to assess the present state of knowledge on the subject and to identify the possible research gaps.

### 2. Theoretical Literature on Gender and Corruption

Gender relations influences and impact division of labour, resource allocation and decision making. There is no denying the fact that like poverty and vulnerability, corruption is a gender-specific phenomenon, as it affects men and women differently. Women and men are subjects and objects of different corrupt practices and behaviour, on the basis of the gender division of labour, engendered decision-making, and gender differentiated authority and command over resources to resist, challenge and benefit from corruption. The theoretical literature on gender and corruption can be divided into two streams: one stream of literature see women focused on the hypothesis that women are really less corrupt than men (Swamy *et al.* 2001; Dollar *et al.* 2001; Goetz, 2007) <sup>[28, 6, 11]</sup> while other sees that the if we control for environmental influences, then women are equally corrupt than men (Esarey and Chirillo, 2013 <sup>[8]</sup>; Alhassan-Alolo, 2007 <sup>[2]</sup>; Sung, 2006. Wang and Min (2014) <sup>[33]</sup> termed first as 'idealistic camp' whereas second as 'realistic camp'. However it may be noted that observed behaviour of women is found to be less corrupt than men but arguments are that it is not due to inherent qualities of men and women but due to interplay of numerous historical, institutional and social factors at work.

#### 2.1 Women are Less Corrupt than Men

- The negative relationship between women's participation and corruption could be due to self-selection. Only a few women reach powerful positions, and these women possibly gain access to these positions as they are from the better part of the women's distribution. Women may follow laws to a greater extent than men because they feel protected by them. As well, girls may be brought up to have higher levels of self-control than boys, which may prevent them from engaging in criminal acts. For women in power, the most important argument for why an increased number in government would affect corruption was that women might lower corruption levels not only by being less involved in corrupt behavior themselves but also by initiating policies to fight corruption or to recruit staff who are less corrupt. (Swamy *et al.*, 2001) <sup>[28]</sup>.

- There is a link between gender and corruption in Europe: countries with a high number of women elected tend to be less corrupt than countries with a low number of women elected. More interesting to note is perhaps that this pattern is repeated at the subnational level: regions in Europe with a high number of locally elected women tend to be less corrupt than regions with a low number of locally elected women. (Wängnerud, 2015) <sup>[34, 37]</sup>.
- Systematic research show that women citizens pay fewer bribes than men citizens; even more debated in the research is the fact that there is a link between the share of women in government and levels of corruption—countries with a high number of women in government tend to be less corrupt than countries with a low number of women in government (see Treisman 2007 for an overview) <sup>[31]</sup>.
- The fact that gender differences in moral behaviour and political attitudes do exist in most societies does not necessarily mean that they are biologically based or that one sex is ethically superior to the other (Noddings 1990; Sung 2006).
- Men are more likely to approve corruption and tax evasion than women; this effect remains robust even after proxies for opportunities such as education, employment status and income have been included. (Torgler and Valev, 2010) <sup>[30]</sup>.

## 2.2 Women are equally corrupt

- The link between gender and corruption is spurious and that higher levels of female participation in government and lower levels of corruption can both be attributed to the advancement of liberal democracy. It is actually the presence of liberal democratic institutions which promote both gender equality and good governance that is the factor at play in reduced corruption here. When analysed in isolation from each other, both the number of women in government and the strength of democratic institutions were strongly and negatively correlated with corruption. But when both the gender and the institutional variables were inserted in the same model, the effects of gender on corruption became statistically non-significant, whereas most of the liberal democracy indicators remained powerful predictors. (Sung 2006, 2012) <sup>[27]</sup>.
- Women are less corrupt than men because; 1) the ways in which they are recruited to public office and powerful positions limit their opportunities for corruption because they lack access to male patronage networks and because of the sexual danger that it implies, and 2) in the cases when women do act less corruptly in social and economic situations this depends on their short time in office, lack of knowledge of how the system works and how to take advantage of their position or their eagerness to prove themselves worthy. These effects will however disappear with time and with increased number of women in office. (Goetz, 2007) <sup>[11]</sup>.
- A higher share of elected women is associated with lower levels of corruption in democracies but not in authoritarian states. Women, as members of a disadvantaged group, have stronger self-interest in following norms, because owing to discrimination they are likely to be punished more severely for transgressing them. As democracies contain a strong norm against corruption, women are more perceptive of this norm than men. Following this line of reasoning, the absence of a gender difference in autocracies is explained by the absence of a norm condemning corruption. (Esarey and Chirillo 2013) <sup>[8]</sup>.
- Women are more at risk of being caught when committing corrupt acts, as they lack the protective networks of men. The difference between women and men in relation to corruption should be greater when the risk of detection is higher. In parliamentary systems, with stronger accountability mechanisms, having a higher share of women in parliament tends to correlate with lower levels of corruption, while this relationship is weaker in presidential systems with weaker accountability mechanisms. (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2016) <sup>[22]</sup>.
- The relationship between gender and corruption differs by institutional context. Where corruption is stigmatized, women will be less tolerant of corruption and less likely to participate compared to men. But if ‘corrupt’ behaviors are an ordinary part of governance supported by political institutions, there will be no corruption gender gap” (Esarey and Chirillo, 2012: 24) <sup>[8]</sup>.
- Individuals with greater access to or opportunities for corrupt behaviour will be more likely to engage in corruption than those without the same opportunities, regardless the sex of the actor. Societal expectations of and from public servants influence the individuals’ corrupt behaviour. If members of the social community expect and accept certain roles of the public servants such as nepotism, the public servants may feel obligated to fulfill the roles expected of them. Women may not prove less corrupt in the public sector if corrupt opportunities and networks are not restrained. Also, the very gender system, which is used to justify women’s proclivity to less corrupt behavior and subsequent integration into the public sector, could itself be the source of corruption as women attempt to fulfill their gender roles” (Alhassan-Alolo, 2007) <sup>[2]</sup>.
- Control over resources and influence makes corruption possible and attractive”, and “in theory, the redistribution of political power triggered by the political emancipation of women should not change the general prevalence of corrupt incidents because the overall levels of motivation and opportunities for corruption remain the same”. (Sung, 2006: 140).
- When conditions and opportunities are equally present and control or monitoring are equally lacking, women in power do seek private interests and personal gains by manipulating the power that the public has invested in their hands in a similar manner to men. Additionally, women in the vicinity of power do seek the maximization of their economic and career-wise benefits either through familial relations or by sex-power exchange (Wang and Min, 2014) <sup>[33]</sup>.
- Difference between men and women is derived from the asymmetry experience between men and women, not their basic properties. The effect of gender on corruption is weaker in the state administration than in the legislative arena, because the bureaucratic administrative logic absorbs actors’ personal characteristics. (Stensöta, Wängnerud and Svensson, 2014) <sup>[25, 36]</sup>.
- There is a higher corruption in societies that limit women’s freedom from participating in social life, after controlling for democracy and female representation in parliament and in business. Therefore, policy to combat corruption may need more than democratic reforms and increasing female

- representation in political and economic life. (Branisa and Ziegler, 2010)<sup>[4]</sup>.
- Schulze and Frank (2003)<sup>[21]</sup> shows that women are less corrupt than men due to their higher risk aversion and not because of their superiority in honesty and cooperativeness.
- Potentially corrupt transactions where women are involved are more likely to fail than male. Corrupt transactions requires trust among the involved partners since a hidden agreement is not enforceable by law, and women seem less willing to establish such a reciprocal relationship with a corrupt official. (Frank *et al.* 2011)<sup>[9]</sup>.
- Women, in general, show lower propensity for corrupt behavior and are more likely to punish others for corruption. The overall pattern is that women either show more pro-social and less corrupt behavior or that there are no significant gender differences. No study in the review finds men to be less corrupt. (Chaudhuri, 2012)<sup>[5]</sup>.

- The male and female public officials have a similar perception of corruption. Moreover, they discover that corruption decreases as the female proportion in the organisation increases, as long as women are the minority in the organization; increasing the proportion of women in the organisation above 70% increases corruption. Therefore, corruption may be more related to the group dynamic than to gender itself; gender equality in an organisation seems to minimize corruption. (Mukherjee and Gokcekus, 2004)<sup>[17]</sup>.

**3. Conclusion**

There are different theories being offered to explain why women are less corrupt than men. These explanations include psychology / biology / experiential realities, opportunity / network, corrupt incentive, culture, risk aversion, resistance towards corruption, institutional context and gender dynamics. The results of different findings are summarized in table-1.

**Table 1:** Summary of the Literature Survey

Women are more ethical than man	Swamy <i>et al.</i> 2001 <sup>[28]</sup> ; Dollar <i>et al.</i> 2001 <sup>[6]</sup>
Women are more concerned with common goods	Goetz, 2007 <sup>[11]</sup>
Women are more responsible than men	Swamy <i>et al.</i> 2001 <sup>[28]</sup> ; Dollar <i>et al.</i> 2001 <sup>[6]</sup>
Women are less likely to condone bribing than men	Swamy <i>et al.</i> 2001 <sup>[28]</sup> ; Torgler and Valev, 2010 <sup>[30]</sup> ; Michailova and Melnykovska, 2009 <sup>[15]</sup> ; Rivas, 2013 <sup>[20]</sup>
Girls may be brought up to have higher levels of self-control than boys	Gottfredson and Hirschi, 1990 <sup>[12]</sup>
Women are less “selfish” than men.	Swamy <i>et al.</i> 2001 <sup>[28]</sup> ; Dollar <i>et al.</i> 2001 <sup>[6]</sup>
Men may have better access to corrupt networks than women	Gërkhani, 2007 <sup>[10]</sup> ; Alhassan-Alolo, 2007 <sup>[2]</sup> ; Goetz, 2007 <sup>[11]</sup> ; Esarey and Chirillo, 2013 <sup>[8]</sup> ; Bjarnegård 2013 <sup>[3]</sup> .
Women have higher risk aversion than men	Schulze and Frank, 2003 <sup>[21]</sup> ; Paternoster and Simpson, 1996 <sup>[19]</sup>
Rather than gender, cultural differences explain negative relationship between gender and corruption.	Alatas <i>et al.</i> 2009 <sup>[1]</sup> ; Michailova and Melnykovska, 2009 <sup>[15]</sup>
Only the opportunities for corruption that differentiate for women and men from being corrupt	Goetz 2007 <sup>[11]</sup> ; Branisa and Ziegler 2010 <sup>[4]</sup> ; Pande and Ford 2102 <sup>[18]</sup> ; Vijayalakshmi 2008 <sup>[32]</sup> ; Mocan 2008 <sup>[16]</sup> .
Relationship between gender and corruption varies by institutional context.	Esarey and Chirillo, 2013 <sup>[8]</sup> ; Alhassan-Alolo, 2007 <sup>[2]</sup> ; Vijayalakshmi, 2008 <sup>[32]</sup> .
Corruption may be more related to the group dynamic than to gender itself	Mukherjee and Gokcekus, 2004 <sup>[17]</sup> ; Echazu, 2010 <sup>[7]</sup> .

Source: Compiled by author

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