

Eka Darbaidze

Gender Dimension of Political Corruption as a Heavy Burden on the Path of Democracy

Abstract

Corruption continues to be one of the most important challenges in both developed and developing countries due to its negative impact on economic and development outcomes. Corruption hinders development and weakens modern societies. Corruption undermines public confidence in state institutions. Corruption especially hinders the progress of transition countries in state building. The resources obtained through corrupt practices are often transformed into economic and social influences that weaken democratic institutions and contribute to even wider spread of corruption.

Until the beginning of the 2000s, corruption was usually considered as a "gender-free phenomenon", so questions about the impact of corruption on gender were not asked. Recently, however, studies have emerged that attempt to examine and identify existing links between corruption and gender.

What is the relationship between women's political participation and corruption? In recent decades, an interesting reality has emerged that indicates a strong correlation between high levels of women's political participation and low levels of corruption. Statistical data from various countries around the world show that high levels of women's representation in political leadership positions are associated with low levels of both types of corruption.

This paper examines how corruption and women's political representation are connected. The purpose of this article is to answer the following questions: How do women influence the reduction of corruption at different levels of government and how does corruption hinder women's political participation?

Keywords: Corruption, women's political participation, women's representation anti-corruption sweeper, clientelistic networks

Summary

One of the most wandering findings of contemporary research on corruption is the wide variation in the capacity of democracies and their ability to contain corruption. At the theoretical level, the implementation of democratic reforms should help the demos to have

control over its own representation and thus avoid the harmful effects of corruption. Nevertheless, many democratic states are still actively fighting the widespread corruption in the country. Among the many attempts of researchers to explain the variation in the wide capacity of democratic countries to contain corruption, one of the most consistent findings in this field may be the fact that there are certain connections between the rate of representation of women in elected positions and the level of corruption in the country. The relationship between women's political participation and corruption first received significant attention at the end of the 20th century, when two research groups (Dollar, Fisman and Gatti, 2001) published a paper that first revealed how Gender on the corruption indicator. They presented results showing that higher representation of women at the national level was associated with lower levels of corruption in the country. The results of the study confirmed that there was a certain correlation between women's political participation and corruption, which was discovered in time by the World Bank, which identified gender equality as an important tool to prevent and fight corruption. This relationship includes the representation of women in elected positions at the national, regional, cabinet level, or in local councils, which has been confirmed by a number of studies conducted in different regions of the world, including Europe, Asia, and Africa.

The following studies about corruption have included not only the representation of women at the national level, but also examined women in government, organizational leadership, and the workforce (Swamy et al., 2001). As a result, Swami and his colleagues suggested several factors explaining the differences in the study. The lower rate of corruption among women may have been due to the following factors, in particular, women may grow up to be fairer and less risk-averse than men; Women, who are usually actively involved in raising their children, may feel that they owe more benevolence and responsibility to teach and pass on appropriate values to their children; Girls may also grow up with higher levels of self-control than boys, which is likely to have an effect on reducing the propensity for criminal behavior in females.

It is interesting that based on the study of data from 30 European countries, the results of the study by Stensöta and other researchers revealed that there is no relationship between the number of women in public administration and the level of corruption (Stensöta et al., 2015). However, it was determined that the higher the number of women in the parliament, the lower the level of perception of corruption among the population. This finding highlighted the importance of the need for continued study and research on the relationship between corruption and women's political participation. Consequently, the majority of corruption studies share the idea that more women's involvement in politics often leads to lower levels of corruption. These conclusions are valid at different levels of government, from the legislative

body to local councils. However, some clear trends emerge, namely that the relationship between women's representation and corruption is particularly strong in contexts of high accountability, as is the case in consolidated democracies. Accordingly, the studies conducted in terms of corruption study are mainly carried out on the basis of global data analysis of the European Union and Latin America.

A recent study of French mayors revealed some interesting results. The mentioned study confirmed that female politicians newly elected to the position of city mayor reduce the risks of corruption, however, in case of their re-election to the same position, unfortunately this positive effect disappears (Bauhr, et al., 2020). The results of the study allow for the following conclusions that, "the link between women's representation and lower levels of corruption depends on the context, and therefore, the effect of women's representation may vary according to the positions and platforms to which women gain access and which also potentially change over time."

Finding a link between low levels of corruption and high rates of women's participation naturally raised questions about identifying the reasons that explain it. Although a number of studies indicate that higher gender equality, and in particular, a higher rate of participation of women in decision-making positions, leads to a reduction in corruption, the question of whether corruption prevents women from holding political positions remains unanswered.

Thus, on the basis of the conducted studies, several factors have been identified that explain the connection between the high political participation of women and the low level of corruption. A number of studies suggest that women may be more conscientious than men, who are more risk-averse; Perhaps women are characterized by different treatment of voters, or perhaps they are simply excluded from the networks of power.

The impact of gender on corruption in public administration systems

The argument that women are less corrupt than men as the "fair sex hypothesis" has gained considerable popularity and has led to the perception of women as the "new anti-corruption cleaning force". However, it should also be noted that some of the more recent studies move away from the phenomenon of considering women as more conscientious politicians with higher ethical and moral obligations than men (Goetz, 2007). A number of studies have shown that women are equally, or even more, willing to take risks if they are in a much more dominant position. Consequently, the probability of women committing crimes is increasing, which may be explained by the fact that social norms have changed in recent

decades, allowing them to actively participate in almost all spheres of activity, including criminal activities.

This approach that women are more conscientious or less prone to risk has been criticized for the formation of gender stereotypes. Some researchers strongly criticize the existing argument and believe that "characteristics attributed to women, which were once considered to cause moral weakness in them, are now considered as the cornerstone of moral strength, which emphasizes the fact that the definition of morality itself has changed (Merkle, 20220).

Effective liberal institutions can allow more women to participate in the country's governance processes and at the same time reduce the rate of corruption, which is confirmed by a study conducted in 2013 (Esarey & Chirillo, 2013). The mentioned study revealed that women's participation had an impact on the level of corruption only when strong political institutions were already established and functioning properly in these countries. An explanatory reason may also be the fact that in the case of such institutions, it is only the case with less corrupt governments, where they actually want to involve women in decision-making positions. In such countries, personal clientelistic networks are less shared and more attention is paid to the merits and experience of the politician himself.

Wängnerud revealed that the participation of women in electoral politics has a more significant effect on corruption than the presence of women in high administrative positions. Which gives the opportunity to make the following conclusion that institutional characteristics are important in determining the role of gender (Wängnerud, L. 2015), for example, as a result of a study conducted in Ghana, it was revealed that male and female civil servants in the public administration system have similar attitudes towards corruption and are equally involved in corrupt activities (Alhassan, 2007). The researcher hypothesizes that whether an individual engages in corrupt activities is a matter of opportunities, networks and social norms rather than gender differences (Alatas, et al., 2009).

In an experimental study conducted in India and Indonesia, the authors found that there are no significant gender differences in attitudes towards corruption. In particular, there are no differences in perceived rent-seeking or actual levels of corruption among elected men and women in India (Alatas, et al., 2009).

It is interesting to note that stronger bureaucratic principles reduce the influence of gender on both corrupt behaviors and attitudes. Studies have shown that public administration systems in European countries, which tend to have very strictly standardized bureaucratic procedures, are less affected by gender norms. However, in the same study, which was conducted in 30 European countries, it was revealed that the number of women in parliament

has a positive effect on the level of perception of corruption. Consequently, women in the country's legislature play a more important role in reducing the level of corruption than in bureaucratic positions; However, the more properly and efficiently the institutions function in the country, the less the effect of gender in such a case.

The impact of corruption on women's political representation

The first studies that identified a link between women's representation at the national level and corruption appeared in the 1990s, finding that the share of women in a country's legislature had a significant effect on corruption rates, while suggesting that corruption might have a negative effect on women's political participation. A study conducted by Pippa Norris in 2019 confirms that the high level of political corruption and political violence in the country leads to a decrease in the number of women elected to the legislature. found that in countries where corruption is widespread, women make up about 3.9% of the legislature, while in countries where there is no corruption, the share of women in parliament triples to 13.6%.

A political career is known to be full of both challenges and opportunities, especially for female politicians. Although the status of women has improved in recent decades, the significant gender gap in economic and political participation remains a significant problem. Researchers have attempted to use a number of different approaches to explain existing gender dynamics, such as attitudes, experiences, socio-economic resources and political socialization, which they believe have led to gender imbalances in terms of political participation. Recently, much more attention has been paid to the study of the role that corruption can play as an obstacle to women's participation in political life. While electoral systems affect women's political participation, corruption may continue to be an additional barrier to women's political participation.

Since political parties are considered gatekeepers for women politicians, party structures play an important role in determining women's chances of holding political office. In order to hold a political position, women have to go through two filters, first of all, women must be trusted and chosen by the political party itself, after which they are already chosen by the voters. On the example of many countries of the world, it has been widely studied and discussed how the cultural norms related to the role of women may turn out to be a sharp obstacle in the way of women's political involvement.

It is also interesting that the stereotypes surrounding women, in addition to the negative influence, may even have a positive influence on the anti-corruption perception of the electorate. Corruption in the selection of candidates for political parties can seriously undermine women's access to political office. In some countries, clientelism acts as a

gatekeeper and prevents women from entering public politics. While it is recognized that democracy offers various minorities, including women, additional channels to express their interests and participate in politics, clientelism is seen as a limiting and hindering barrier to the real political participation of the majority of citizens.

A study of federal congressional elections in Argentina found that women members of Congress were more likely to represent political parties that were less connected to clientelistic networks (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2014). It is interesting that before entering politics in Mexico, women often start their careers in the civil sector, in particular, by working in civil society organizations, and not in well-formed clientelistic networks, where they simultaneously create and shape support groups during their work. Thus, corruption undermines the normalization of relations between civil society and the government. Female politicians have a specific reason to stay away from corruption so as not to alienate their supporters and thus jeopardize their political careers.

Access to political office often also requires access to informal and male-dominated networks that exclude women. Networks and high levels of corruption seem to be the main barriers against women's involvement in politics. Researchers who analyzed data from European local councils claim that corruption continues to be a major influence on the selection process. Women are excluded from corrupt networks that are dominated by men and are usually created for their own privileges (Sundström & Wängnerud, 2016). Accordingly, a number of studies have identified and recognized male-dominated patronage networks as a major obstacle to women's entry into public politics. When formal rules are weak or poorly enforced, informal practices of patronage and clientelism harm women. Consequently, they remain vulnerable as they lack access to the resources, privileges, and patronage needed for clientelism, including patronage networks and campaign funds, which are likely to pose a significant challenge to female politicians trying to penetrate the "old boys' network."

The consensus that corruption has a negative impact on women continues to exist today. A high rate of corruption is linked to a high level of gender inequality in the country, and thus the debate about whether more women in politics will reduce corruption remains a hot topic among policymakers. Women are more negatively affected by corruption than men. Accordingly, corruption has a negative effect on women's participation in political life and creates serious obstacles to their positioning. It limits women's access to political parties, since corrupt leaders try to distance women from politics as much as possible, which naturally helps them and does not create additional problems in the process of carrying out corrupt activities or maintaining male-dominated networks. Corruption is a serious obstacle to women's political participation when male-dominated networks influence the selection

process of political party candidates (Sundström & Wängnerud, 2016, 355). In cases where corruption is widespread in the country, such obstacles include: legal inconsistencies, problems of equal access, lack of regulatory, formal institutions, or low efforts to increase the substantive representation of women in politics.

Women may have less access to opportunities, often not having the same access to positions of power or decision-making as men. Furthermore, the network is an essential aspect of corruption and is usually based on "strong group trust", which ensures involvement in illegal activities and effective management of their activities. And women often do not have access to these clientelistic networks because corruption relies on "homosocial" capital, a type of social capital built on relationships between men. Consequently, patronage networks are often dominated by men, who exclude the participation of women. Similar conclusions were made in the case of a study conducted in Iceland (Johnson et al, 2013). In particular, the increase in the number of women in politics may lead to the breakdown of existing networks, which will naturally reduce the level of corruption in the country. Women who are marginalized in politics and thus lack access to powerful networks are more likely to criticize and fight corrupt behavior when they encounter it personally. Consequently, the more women gain access to political positions, the greater the willingness and ability to destroy existing networks, which will naturally lead to a reduction in the level of corruption in the country.

Women in politics face other challenges as well. Often women politicians, unlike men, are less forgiven by their own voters for their mistakes. Accordingly, when the risks associated with corruption are high, women are less likely to engage in corrupt activities (Esarey & Schwindt-Bayer 2018). Thus, the increase in women's political representation significantly reduces the level of corruption, if the involvement of a female politician in corrupt activities is associated with special risks. As a rule, women are more sensitive and evaluate corruption and sexual scandals more negatively.

Women as an opposing force against corruption

It is widely recognized that gender equality is associated with various desirable social outcomes, and it also has a positive impact on a country's economic development rate. Countries with high gender equality and women's political representation tend to have better protection of human rights and freedoms, and such societies are less at risk of civil confrontation. A number of studies confirm that men and women experience the consequences of corruption differently. Corruption in public services negatively affects women as they are the main beneficiaries of public services, even in pregnancy, maternal and child health. Consequently, they suffer more from the harmful effects of corruption in the mentioned sector. Studies also establish that the important focus of female politicians on

women and children protection and welfare policies also leads to qualitative improvement in the delivery and monitoring of public services, ultimately reducing the level of corruption in the mentioned direction.

Female politicians are generally supported in elections by female voters, who in many cases expect a female candidate to focus on women's interests and needs, which are often directly related to the quality of public service delivery. Thus, the mechanisms by which women reduce the level of corruption also differ by type of corruption. The active involvement of women has reduced both petty and grand corruption, for completely different reasons. Women focus their attention on sectors that are traditionally important for women. On the other hand, they try to fight big corruption by breaking up male-dominated networks, which, in many cases, not only exclude the presence of women in their structures, but at the same time are a necessary factor in maintaining corruption.

Different forms of corruption may have completely different causes and social consequences. Determining the differences between different forms of corruption will help us to understand not only the results of reforms, but also to explain why these results occur. As a rule, corruption researchers distinguish two main forms of corruption: petty corruption, defined as small-scale transactions in the provision of public services, and grand corruption, defined as collusion at the highest levels of government, involving public and private elites in major public sector projects, procurements and large financial benefits. In elected office, women are mobilized against both forms of corruption and therefore have a positive effect on the degree of reduction of both “petty” and “Grand” corruption partly for different reasons. Research on political representation generally finds that women in elected office are more likely to try to improve the delivery of public services, and especially the kinds of services that help women (Bauhr, M., Charron, N., & Wängnerud, L. 2019). Improving the quality of public service delivery may reduce the need for women to engage in corrupt transactions. The mechanism operating at this level is called the "Women's Interests Mechanism", which mobilizes elected women mainly against petty corruption. There is evidence that high levels of corruption pose serious obstacles to women's political participation. That is why female politicians have a strong incentive to break through the corrupt networks that are detrimental to their political careers.

Understanding corruption perceptions and institutional marginalization

There are cases where the increased representation of women does not have a positive effect, as it may be used as a mere mechanism to cover up the problems and challenges in the country. Authoritarian regimes have a precedent of using female politicians to disguise failed

and corrupt government policies. The promotion of women to high bureaucratic positions is considered a relatively cheap and easy way for the corrupt government to fight against the threat of the existing regime.

The informal marginalization of women in various institutions may be one of the reasons why they are perceived as less corrupt by society. Corruption scandals usually destroy voters' trust in governments. The idea that women are less corrupt has gained particular popularity among political elites due to the perception that women are much more difficult to bribe. For example, Peru's President Alberto Fujimori and the National Police decided to man the police forces with women (Goetz, 2007). In Uganda, women are often appointed to lead investigations into corruption in the police force and are often elected to the position of treasurer in local government in the expectation that they will reduce the waste of public expenditure (Goetz, 2007).

More and more studies show that the presence of female politicians in power or in decision-making positions leads to the belief in the population about the low level of corruption in the country and at the same time contributes to the increase of their trust in governments (Barnes & Jones, 2018). Interestingly, an international study in Latin America found that adopting gender quotas to increase women's representation in parliament was associated with greater public trust in government and reduced perceptions of corruption (Schwindt-Bayer, 2010). A subnational level study on Argentina reveals that an increase in the presence of women in local representative bodies is associated with a higher level of trust in local government among the population (Barnes & Jones, 2018).

Women are marginalized in a wide range of formal and informal political institutions. Consequently, the informal marginalization of women in institutions may be one of the reasons why they are perceived as less corrupt by society (Barnes, 2016). When women enter politics, they usually lack ties to already firmly established political networks and therefore come to power through alternative routes (Escobar-Lemmon, M.C, 2016). The example of Japan once again reinforces the idea that the marginalization of women can reduce suspicions about the existence of corruption in the country. Japan has the lowest level of female representation in the national parliament among industrialized democracies. Nevertheless, in 2016, a female politician was elected governor of Tokyo. Yoriko Koike won the election at a time when corruption has become the country's top challenge in the minds of Japanese voters, after corruption scandals brought down the previous two governors. Voters considered Koike to be an interested politician in the fight against corruption, although at the same time he was the most prominent political outsider among the candidates presented. It was interesting that she was running not only as a woman, but also against the wishes of her former party, the

ruling Liberal Democrats. Koike eventually won the election and very quickly created an image of a popular politician fighting against corruption.

Factors affecting corruption

Recent studies on the impact of corruption on women's political participation identify several factors that have a significant negative impact on their participation in politics. The procedure for selecting candidates during elections is significantly different for male and female candidates. Due to discrimination, female candidates often have to work harder and put in more effort to succeed. The severity of the problems in this area once again emphasizes the need for more studies with intersectional approaches to gender that reveal how stereotypes about sexual, ethnic, or racial minorities affect the opportunities for political participation of members of these groups.

As already mentioned, studies also show that women may be less prone to corruption due to their higher accountability. Accountability is higher among female politicians, as voters are more sensitive and demanding towards them, especially in cases of improper and illegal actions by female politicians (Larcinese, et al., 2017). Female voters react more sharply to the corrupt actions of female politicians. Accordingly, they "punish" more harshly and forget less the inappropriate actions of female politicians for the mistakes they made. Women's risk identifiability, an indicator of voters' high trust in female politicians, creates a higher standard of demand and accountability for female politicians among voters. Women are more against corruption in a democratic environment than in an authoritarian one. This further strengthens the argument that as electoral accountability and the functioning of democratic institutions improve, an increase in women's political participation may further reduce the level of corruption in a country.

As a rule, stereotypes play an important role in political life. An important part of the discussions about what kind of necessary characteristics are needed for positioning in public policy is related to gender stereotypes. As a rule, straight men are considered perfectly suited for positions in public politics, because of their "masculine" qualities, such as aggression and competition, which are generally recognized as essential characteristics for success in political activity. On the other hand, feminine characteristics such as nurturing and gentleness are generally considered more characteristic of women and gay men. Accordingly, there is an opinion from the public that they mainly care about the welfare of citizens, are more ethical and more conscientious. A study by Barnes and Beaulieu (2018) is also interesting in that it shows that suspicions of electoral fraud are significantly reduced when female candidates participate, even though the circumstances may seem less plausible at first glance. This can be explained by the existence of gender stereotypes, according to which women are perceived as

more reliable and honest politicians by voters (Escobar-Lemmon, M. C. 2011). At the same time, it is the existing stereotypes about the marginalization of women that lead to a decrease in suspicions of corruption, as well as a lack of faith in the ability of women to maneuver in political activities. Barney and Beaulieu's (2018) research clearly shows how these stereotypes can be both beneficial and negative at the same time.

Part of the political agenda of female politicians is to support policies that improve the delivery of public services and improve women's daily lives. Alexander and Ravlik (2015) refer to the "women's interest mechanism" and emphasize the fact that some actions of female politicians in society may have significant spillover effects that have a corresponding impact on corruption. Since women are special users of public services, where resources are used for public welfare and not for private purposes, this is why female politicians fight for strict monitoring and transparency of the state, which in the long run leads to a reduction in the level of corruption in the country (Alexander & Ravlik 2015). It is interesting to note that the least corrupt countries today are usually the northern countries, such as Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark, where the political representation of women is high. Female legislators separately focus on important issues in the field of women's "special interest" such as social spending and women's rights. The adoption of laws on gender issues and the protection of marginalized groups ultimately have a positive impact on citizens' perceptions of corruption and improve the quality of government performance. Studies in Brazil have clearly shown that female mayors are more effective in delivering public services.

Thus, the mechanism of women's interest is related to the principle of accountability and creates a space of significant responsibility between elected representatives and voters/citizens. Consequently, female politicians implement a slightly but different political agenda than their male counterparts, both during the election campaign and between election periods, which accordingly has a positive impact on the corruption reduction rate.

Conclusion

Thus, studies conducted on the influence of gender on corruption reveal that there is a strong relationship between the representation of women in elected positions and a low rate of corruption in the country. Although this relationship is neither linear nor non-dynamic, it is influenced by a number of factors. The available evidence clearly indicates why gender empowerment and anti-corruption initiatives should be closely linked.

An increase in the number of women in political positions has a positive impact on the reduction of corruption at the national, regional or cabinet level. Although the relationship is complex, the active participation of more women in the political sphere often contributes and has a positive effect in the fight against political and bureaucratic corruption.

It is clear that the impact of women on reducing corruption depends on the context. Studies show that the effect of women's substantive empowerment on reducing corruption is particularly strong when the level of gender inequality is high and when bureaucratic rules are weak. Women often do not have access to the same networks as men, increasing the number of female politicians is the best leverage to neutralize existing clientelistic networks and strengthen anti-corruption initiatives in the country. Substantial representation of women may be improved by reducing the level of corruption where clientelistic networks exclude women from representation. The disintegration of these networks not only reduces the level of corruption in the country, but also improves the participation of women and promotes the growth of their representation in politics.

Women play an important role in anti-corruption activities. On the one hand, they often focus on issues such as the provision of services and services that are less prioritized by men, in which the fight against corruption is an essential element of guaranteeing delivery. On the other hand, women, who are not members of clientelistic networks like male politicians, focus on strengthening civil society and supporting women, who often demand a clearer emphasis on anti-corruption activities and stricter control and response to any illegal actions.

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