

# Are women less corrupt? New study suggests it depends on cultural expectations

September 12 2013

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Women are more likely than men to disapprove of—and less likely to participate in—political corruption, but only in countries where corruption is stigmatized, according to new political science research from Rice University.

"'Fairer Sex' or Purity Myth? Corruption, Gender and Institutional Context" finds that women are less tolerant of corrupt behavior, but only in democratic governments, where appropriating public policy for private gain is typically punished by voters and courts.

"The relationship between gender and [corruption](#) appears to depend on context," said Justin Esarey, an assistant professor of political science at Rice and the study's lead author. "When corruption is stigmatized, as in most democracies, women will be less tolerant and less likely to engage in it compared with men. But if 'corrupt' behaviors are an ordinary part of governance supported by political institutions, there will be no corruption [gender gap](#)."

Esarey noted that previous research has shown that greater female participation in government (that is, in the legislature) is associated with lower levels of perceived corruption. However, he said that his research reveals that this relationship does not exist in autocracies, where women might feel more compelled to go along with the status quo than challenge the system.

"States that have more corruption tend to be less democratic," Esarey

said. "In autocracies, [bribery](#), [favoritism](#) and personal loyalty are often characteristic of normal government operations and are not labeled as corruption."

Esarey theorized that many women feel bound by their society's political norms, including when they make decisions as government officials.

"In short, recruiting [women](#) into government would be unlikely to reduce corruption across the board," Esarey said.

The study was completed in two parts. The first part of the study evaluated corruption at the national level, using data from three organizations that monitor and measure corruption: Transparency International, the World Bank Governance Indicators and the International Crisis Risk Group. The data was collected on 157 countries between 1998 and 2007. The second part of the study evaluated attitudes toward corruption on an individual level in 68 countries, using data from the World Values Survey (WVS). WVS surveys how much people tolerate corruption on an individual level. The data was collected between 1999 and 2002.

Esarey hopes the research will encourage other scholars to study more closely the effect of gender discrimination on corruption around the world.

The study will appear in an upcoming edition of *Politics and Gender* and was co-authored by Gina Chirillo, program assistant for the Central and West Africa team at the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs in Washington, D.C. The study is available online at <http://jee3.web.rice.edu/corruption.pdf>.

Provided by Rice University

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