

Edited Volume on Gender and Corruption: The Role of Norms
by Ina Kubbe and Ortrun Merkle

**Unpacking the Link between Gender and Corruption Using Survey Data:
A Multilevel Analysis of 30 European Countries**

Giulia M. Dotti Sani & Simona Guglielmi

<a> INTRODUCTION

The link between corruption measured at the national level and the presence of women in the public and political sphere has received considerable attention in the international literature and from policymakers in the last twenty years (LABOR, 2021). Specifically, seminal research on gender and corruption has indicated the existence of a positive association at the macro-societal level between the presence of women in the public sphere and the control of corruption (Swamy *et al.*, 2001; Dollar, Fisman and Gatti, 2001).

As a first step, these results were interpreted as an indication of the fact that women may play a key role in the fight against corruption. Although several macro-level studies showed a non-spurious correlation between women's presence in the public field and the corruption rate, more recent research has revealed that the observed link is partially explained by other macro phenomena, such as the level of democracy (Stensöta, 2018; Sung, 2003) or economic development (Lash, 2004). Moreover, the strength of correlation has been found to depend on the specific domain investigated, such as the kind of female participation, for example, in the political vs labour force (Jha and Sarangi, 2018); the different arena in which corruption may arise, for example, in the political, administrative or business world (Stensöta and Wängnerud, 2018); and the kind of corruption investigated (Bauhr and Charron, 2020). Finally, reverse causality should be taken into consideration. For example, there are shades of evidence that women's representation decreases corruption *and* that corruption decreases women's participation in government (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2019; Jha and Sarangi, 2018).

Despite this caveat, the myth of women as "political cleaners" (Goetz, 2007) is resistant to change. The idea that women are inherently more honest than men is so widespread in public opinion too that several studies

have shown a correlation between the presence of women in politics and reduced suspicion of corruption (Alexander, Bågenholm and Charron, 2020; Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019). According to this view, as women gain access to the *war room*, they can impose their “higher moral standards” and limit the spread of corrupt behaviour. This view more or less implicitly assumes a micro-level explanation based on attitudinal differences between men and women concerning corruption. However, this explanation rests on the heavy assumptions that 1) women do actually have different (and higher) moral standards than men when it comes to doing the right thing and 2) when in the war room, women do actually behave differently from men.

Against this background, this chapter provides a contribution to the literature by offering a micro-level explanation of the link between gender and corruption using recent survey data from the European Values Study (2020). The chapter focuses on social norms rather than on personal involvement in corruption and other illicit activities (Nils C. Köbis, Daniel Iragorri-Carter and Christopher Starke, 2018). Social psychologists call these injunctive norms: they indicate what one “ought to do” (Cialdini et al. 1990). Specifically, a cross-national perspective is used to investigate the extent to which gender interacts with some individual and country-specific institutional factors affecting tolerance of corruption and other illicit behaviour.

Drawing upon previous research literature, we empirically test two main mechanisms underpinning the association between gender and tolerance towards corruption. The first focuses on differences in socialization to gender roles (Suar and Gochhayat, 2016), while the second centres on opportunities for women to engage in corrupt behaviour and collusive networks (Goetz, 2007; Bjarnegård, 2013). Finally, we analyse how certain key contextual variables are associated with the nexus between gender and tolerance towards corruption.

The theoretical framework underpinning the hypotheses is presented in the next section, which is followed by a presentation of the data and methodology. We then illustrate the results of our empirical analysis. The chapter closes with a discussion of the main results.

<a> THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the last 20 years, several studies have shown a persistent link between gender and corruption at the macro level (Swamy *et al.*, 2001; Jha and Sarangi, 2018). In other words, the research has found that in countries where women are more engaged in politics and more active in the wider public sphere, the overall levels of corruption are lower. Figure 1 below shows evidence of this for the sample of European countries analysed in

this chapter: the countries that display higher levels of societal gender equality – measured by the Global Gender Gap Index (WEF 2020) – also display greater control over corruption (Worldwide Governance Indicators). In particular, those countries with the highest levels of gender equality, such as Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland, also have very high levels of control over corruption. On the contrary, corruption is much more widespread in southern, eastern and south-eastern countries, which also display considerably lower levels of societal gender equality.

[FIGURE 1 HERE]

This chapter aims to offer a micro-level explanation of this nexus. It argues that women do not naturally reject corruption, but rather that the gender gap in attitudes towards corruption observed at the aggregate level is the result of persisting inequalities in terms of gender roles and political and social engagement. This argument refers to the growing empirical literature that accounts for corrupt behaviour using explanations that go beyond the motives derived from rational choice models. Indeed, incentives and opportunities only partially explain why some individuals are more likely to engage in illicit behaviour than others.

Testing whether a gender gap exists in the way women and men think and evaluate certain types of behaviour is pivotal to understanding the extent to which the observed macro-level association between gender equality and the spread of corruption can be traced to differences in women's and men's morality at the individual level. Despite the complex link between attitudes and behaviour, the relationship between high moral standards and a low risk of dishonest behaviour seems well established. Based on a specific field, scholars focusing on social/cultural norms as antecedents to individual behaviour in the context of public goods have stressed the role of some kind of collective morality, whether this be "tax morale" (Horodnic, 2018; Torgler, 2007), "fraud tolerance" (Knechel and Mintchik, 2021) or "civic morality" (Letki, 2006; Rose, 2011)¹.

Unfortunately, despite its growth, this micro-level line of inquiry based on public opinion surveys is still largely unexplored in the literature on gender and corruption (Amy C. Alexander, 2018; Chabova, 2017; Wysmulek, 2019). Investigation into the determinants of the justifiability of corruption at the individual level is quite recent (Gatti, Paternostro and Rigolini, 2003; Hunady, 2017). The results are mixed, largely dependent on the specific sample investigated or the measurement adopted. Moreover, socio-demographic predictors of involvement in corruption and the perception of the extent of corruption in the country do not necessarily

overlap with the factors determining the justifiability of corruption (Mocan, 2004) (Torgler and Dong, 2008). Nevertheless, the positive relationship between gender and a greater aversion to corruption seems to be stable. At the same time, the link is strongly affected by different contexts (Amy C. Alexander, 2018; Esarey and Chirillo, 2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer, 2018). Against the “fairer-sex hypothesis” and the myth of women’s incorruptibility (Goetz, 2007; Esarey and Chirillo, 2013), scholars have pointed out that gender differences in attitudes towards corruption are rooted in social, cultural and institutional settings (Stensöta and Wängnerud, 2018), as cross-national comparisons show (Debski *et al.*, 2018; Hao, Chang and Sun, 2018; Amy C. Alexander, 2018).

In line with the literature stressing the role of social and cultural factors (Kubbe and Engelbert, 2018), to investigate the nexus between gender and corruption at a micro level, we assumed that individual attitudes towards corruption could be better understood by broadening the outlook to other dishonest behaviour in the civic and citizenship framework. Following Letky (2006: 306), we have called this attitude “civic morality”, which “refers to the sense of civic responsibility for the public good, and thus entails obedience to the rules, and honest and responsible behaviour. It leads citizens to maximize public rather than private gains, therefore deterring them from engaging in corruption and free-riding. It implies accepting duties as given by society and owed to all of its members or to society in general”.

Based on the literature, three main general arguments may be found to explain the positive association between gender and attitudes towards corruption and other un-civic behaviour.

First, the association is consistent with traditional gender-role socialization (Flanagan and Jackson, 1987). There is growing evidence that not only women tend to be more dutiful/consciousness/prosocial than men (Costa, Terracciano and McCrae, 2001), but also that gender roles are better predictors of ethical attitudes/behaviour than biological sex (Suar and Gochhayat, 2016; McCabe, Ingram and Dato-on, 2006). Moreover, cross-national research has shown that people with stronger gender egalitarian values attribute greater importance to honest elections and that the relationship is stronger in countries with higher average gender egalitarian values (Amy C. Alexander, 2018). It has also been demonstrated that a sense of civic duty mediates the relationship between sex and electoral participation (Carreras, 2018; Galais and Blais, 2019), solving the paradox according to which women display a lower level of political participation, except in voting. Moreover, it has been argued that women are more risk-averse due to their social roles. Consequently, they

feel greater pressure to conform to corruption desirability norms (Esarey and Chirillo, 2013). Against this background, we expected that the gender gap in attitudes towards corruption and other dishonest behaviour would decrease when taking into account individual attitudes towards gender social norms. In other words, the more men and women are free from the constraints of traditional gender roles, the more they should display similar levels of civic morality.

Secondly, many scholars have stressed the role of marginalization in explaining the positive association between being female and “civic morality”. In this view, women are more intolerant towards corruption and other un-civic behaviour simply because they have fewer opportunities to be involved in the political system and social networks, thus creating a vicious circle. Marginalization can intensify the effects of corruption on equality, making it even more difficult for groups exposed to discrimination (women, ethnic minorities, etc.) to actively participate in politics and society (2020). Moreover, marginalization reduces the opportunity to be part of a network of trust, a necessary condition to achieve corrupt objectives (Uribe, 2014; Pena López and Sánchez Santos, 2014; Bjarnegård, 2013; Goetz, 2007). There is evidence that highly educated/politically sophisticated people tend to be more able to discern corruption (Weitz-Shapiro and Winters, 2017), to react more strongly to illicit behaviour (Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz, 2013; Truex, 2011) and to display negative attitudes towards corruption (Torgler and Dong, 2008; Dong and Torgler, 2009). Nevertheless, these relationships depend on contextual factors, such as the level of corruption (Agerberg, 2019) or social capital/trust (Bäck and Christensen, 2016; Rose-Ackerman, 2001; Rothstein and Uslaner, 2005). Trust and social capital seem to play a key role in influencing individual justifications of corruption. At a macro level, the virtuous circle of high trust, low corruption and low inequality is widely investigated (Uslaner and You, 2017). Against this picture, it is reasonable to expect that the link between gender and civic morality is influenced by different levels of civic/political engagement and social capital. Indeed, we expected that the gender gap in attitudes towards corruption and other illicit behaviour would decrease when taking into account individual proxies of political engagement, such as political interest (Fraile and Gomez, 2017) and education. As regards social trust, we expected the gender gap to be smaller among those who trust others.

Finally, scholars have pointed out that the link between gender and corruption is conditional on the context in which actors operate. Turning to the micro level under investigation here, cross-national research has

suggested that economic prosperity, gender equality and political accountability socialize norms of impartiality that support a general culture of anti-corruption (Amy C. Alexander, 2018).

** Hypotheses**

We developed four hypotheses against this background:

- H1 *The gender gap hypothesis*: Across countries, we expected that women would be less inclined to justify corruption and other illicit behaviour.
- H2 *The marginalization hypothesis*: The gender gap in the justifiability of corruption and other illicit behaviour was expected to be smaller among a) the highly educated; b) those interested in politics and c) those who trust others;
- H3 *The gender social norms hypothesis*: The gender gap in the justifiability of corruption and other illicit behaviour was expected to be smaller among those with more progressive gender roles;
- H4 *The contextual variability hypothesis*: The gender gap in the justifiability of illicit behaviour was expected to be smaller in countries that are overall a) less corrupt; b) more gender-egalitarian and c) more economically equal.

<a>DATA, VARIABLES AND METHOD

The analyses were based on data from the European Value Study (2020), a large-scale comparative survey fielded periodically since 1981 that is focused on collecting information on citizens' opinions, attitudes, beliefs and preferences on a wide range of topics. For the scope of this research, we focused on the most recent wave of data collected between 2017 and 2020 and restricted our sample to subjects between 18 and 80 years old living in the following 30 European countries²: Albania (AL), Austria (AT), Belarus (BY), Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA), Bulgaria (BG), Croatia (HR), Czech Republic (CZ), Denmark (DK), Estonia (EE), Finland (FI), France (FR), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Iceland (IS), Italy (IT), Lithuania (LT), Montenegro (ME), the Netherlands (NL), North Macedonia (MK), Norway (NO), Poland (PL), Portugal (PT), Romania (RO), Serbia (RS), the Slovak Republic (SK), Slovenia (SI), Spain (ES), Sweden (SE), Switzerland (CH) and the

² Countries not belonging to the European area were excluded, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Furthermore, Russia was excluded because of an excess of missing values on key variables of interest.

United Kingdom (UK). Overall, after list-wise deletion of cases with missing values on key variables of interest, our sample consisted of 42,037 women and men.

To examine gender differences in the extent to which citizens approve corruption and other illicit behaviour (civic immorality), we built a dependent variable that gauged whether respondents found it justifiable or not to engage in five different actions. Specifically, the subjects were asked: “Please tell me for each of the following whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between”. The statements considered for our analyses were: 1) Claiming state benefits which you are not entitled to; 2) Cheating on tax if you have the chance; 3) Someone accepting a bribe in the course of their duties; 4) Avoiding a fare on public transport; and 5) Political violence. The possible responses ranged from 0 (can never be justified) to 10 (can always be justified). The alpha score for the five items was satisfactory (0.72) and factor analyses indicated the existence of one underlying dimension. Therefore, we combined them into an integrated index of justifiability based on the average of the four items. This had the advantage of maintaining the original 0 to 10 scale of the variables, where the lower values indicated that the respondent was less inclined to justify that type of illicit behaviour and higher values indicated a greater propensity to justify it.

Our main independent variable was of course gender (man vs woman), which was interacted with specific predictors to test the “marginalization” (H2a-c) and the “gender social norms” (H3) hypotheses.

To test Hypothesis 2, gender was interacted with the respondents’ level of education (primary and lower secondary as the reference, upper secondary, tertiary and above); their interest in politics (not at all interested and not very interested as the reference vs quite interested and very interested) and the measure of horizontal trust (people cannot be trusted as the reference vs people can be trusted). To test Hypothesis 3, we included an index capturing the subjects’ attitudes towards gender roles in the public sphere. Specifically, the respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the following statements: 1) On the whole, men make better political leaders than women; 2) A university education is more important for men than women; 3) On the whole, men make better business executives than women. The more subjects disagreed with the statements, the higher the values of the index based on these three items ($\alpha=0.78$). Hence, it measured support for gender equality in the public sphere.

The models also included a set of controls, namely age in years and its square; employment status (employed as the reference, vs non-employed); position on the left-right scale (don’t know as the reference;

left, centre, and right); subjects' opinion on whether democracy is a good way of governing the country (very good as the reference vs fairly good, bad); and respondents' political and social engagement (no as the reference category, yes indicating that they belonged to at least one of the following: trade unions; political parties/groups; environment, ecology or animal rights groups; charitable/humanitarian organizations). In the preliminary analyses, we also included measures of household income in deciles and marital status. Because the variables were not statistically significant and their inclusion did not alter the overall model fit, they were ultimately excluded from the analyses.

At the macro institutional level, we included three measures that could potentially explain individual-level variation in our outcome. First, we included a variable capturing control of corruption, which gauged the "perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, as well as 'capture' of the state by elites and private interests" (Worldwide Governance Indicators). Higher values indicated a greater control of corruption in the country. In our data the variable ranged from a minimum of -0.57 in Bosnia and Herzegovina to a maximum of 2.21 in Finland. We also included a measure of societal gender equality using the Global Gender Gap Index, a measure developed by the World Economic Forum that captures global gender-based disparities based on economic, education, health and political criteria. The variable was constructed to range from 0 to 1, where 1 stands for perfect equality between women and men across the various domains considered. In our data, Hungary scored the lowest (0.700) and Iceland the highest (0.874). Finally, based on the expectation that people would be less inclined to justify illicit behaviour in societies where income is more equally distributed among its members, we included the Gini index (2015 World Bank), which measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. The Gini index ranges from 0, indicating perfect equality, to 100, indicating perfect income inequality. In our EVS sample of countries, Serbia had the highest level of income inequality (40.5) and Slovenia the lowest (25.4). Table 1 reports summary statistics of all the variables included in the models by gender.

We used multilevel linear models with random intercepts and, subsequently, random slopes with cross-level interactions to test our hypotheses. We applied a simple two-level design with individuals nested in countries. To test our first hypothesis, according to which we expected women would be less inclined to justify

illicit behaviour across countries, a dummy variable for gender was included first on its own (Model 1) and then along with the control variables (Model 2).

Table 1. Summary statistics by gender. Means (sd) and proportions. EVS 2020. Own elaboration.

	Men (N = 19234)	Women (N = 22803)	Min	Max
<i>Level 1 variables</i>				
Civic immorality index	2.00 (1.29)	1.87 (1.21)	0.4	10
Age	49.03 (17)	48.94 (17)	18	80
Gender roles (standardized)	-0.08 (0.93)	0.19 (0.88)	-5.52	1
<i>Level of education</i>				
Low	0.19	0.21		
Medium	0.48	0.43		
High	0.33	0.35		
<i>Employment status</i>				
Employed	0.60	0.52		
Not employed	0.40	0.48		
<i>Politically and socially engaged: yes</i>	0.31	0.30		
<i>Left-right scale</i>				
1 to 4	0.26	0.25		
5 to 6	0.33	0.34		
7 to 10	0.29	0.23		
Don't know	0.12	0.18		
<i>Democracy good for the country</i>				
Very good	0.64	0.62		
Fairly good	0.31	0.33		
Bad	0.05	0.05		
<i>Horizontal trust</i>				
Other people can be trusted	0.41	0.39		
<i>Interested in politics: yes</i>	0.58	0.45		
<i>Level 2 variables</i>				
Control of Corruption Index	0.97	0.97	-0.57	2.21
Gender Gap Index	0.74	0.05	0.67	0.87
Gini	31.64	3.94	25.40	40.50
N		42,037		

To test Hypotheses 2 and 3, Models 3a-d included interactions between gender and, respectively, level of education (a), interest in politics (b), horizontal trust (c) and attitudes toward gender roles (d). Model 4 included the random term for gender at the macro level and models 4a, 4b and 4c included the three macro-level indicators. The macro-level variables were included one at the time to avoid collinearity and centred at the

grand mean to facilitate model convergence. Furthermore, the Gini index was divided by 10 to facilitate comparability with the other macro-level indicators. Finally, in models 5a, 5b and 5c, we included cross-level interactions between gender and the three macro-level variables to test hypothesis 4, namely, that the gender gap in justifiability of illicit behaviour would be smaller in countries that are overall a) less corrupt; b) more gender egalitarian and c) more economically equal.

<a>RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 2 reports the results for the random intercept models that allowed testing of hypotheses 1, 2 and 3. As can be seen from Model 1, the coefficient for women was negative and statistically different to zero ($\beta=-0.148$, $p<0.001$), indicating that women are on average less inclined to justify illicit behaviour compared to men. The negative sign and magnitude of the coefficient was maintained in Model 2 once the control variables were included, confirming that, *ceteris paribus*, across Europe men tend to justify illicit behaviour more than women, thus corroborating Hypothesis 1. However, considering the range and standard deviation of the outcome, it is critical to point out that the gender gap was very small in substantive terms: in other words, women were only marginally less inclined to justify illicit behaviour compared to men. The other variables included in model 2 provided some useful insights. As expected, more highly educated individuals, those with more egalitarian gender role attitudes and with more interest in politics were less inclined to justify illicit behaviour. All of the coefficients were statistically significant, probably due to the large sample size, but quite small in magnitude. In contrast, trusting other people was not associated with the outcome.

Moving to the interaction terms to test Hypotheses 2 and 3a-c, we can see that the interaction between gender and level of education (Model 3a) and gender and trust in others (Model 3c) were not statistically significant, indicating no difference between women and men in the way these two variables were associated with the outcome. In contrast, we observed positive interaction effects between gender and gender role attitudes ($\beta=0.047$, $p<0.001$) and between gender and interest in politics ($\beta=0.067$, $p<0.01$). Concerning the former, in line with Hypothesis 2, the positive interaction term indicated that, at higher levels of support for egalitarian gender roles, the gender gap in the outcome variable became even smaller and women and men were more similar in the extent to which they justified illicit behaviour. In contrast, the difference between women and men was wider among subjects with more conservative gender role attitudes.

Table 2. Random intercept models. Dependent variables: justifiability of illicit behaviors. Standard errors in parentheses (N subjects = 42,037, N groups=30).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3a	Model 3b	Model 3c	Model 3d
<i>Fixed part</i>						
Women	-0.148*** (0.012)	-0.127*** (0.012)	-0.144*** (0.025)	-0.162*** (0.017)	-0.131*** (0.015)	-0.13*** (0.012)
Level of education						
Medium ed.		-0.033* (0.016)	-0.055 (0.049)	-0.033* (0.016)	-0.033* (0.016)	-0.034* (0.016)
High ed.		-0.053** (0.018)	-0.102* (0.052)	-0.052** (0.018)	-0.053** (0.018)	-0.054** (0.018)
Progressive gender roles		-0.067*** (0.007)	-0.068*** (0.007)	-0.068*** (0.007)	-0.067*** (0.007)	-0.139*** (0.02)
Interested in politics		-0.034** (0.012)	-0.034** (0.012)	-0.137*** (0.037)	-0.034** (0.012)	-0.035** (0.012)
Trust in others: yes		0.012 (0.013)	0.012 (0.013)	0.011 (0.013)	-0.003 (0.037)	0.012 (0.013)
Interactions:						
Women × Medium ed.			0.014 (0.03)			
Women × High ed.			0.032 (0.032)			
Women × Gender roles						0.047*** (0.012)
Women × Interested in politics				0.067** (0.023)		
Women × Trust in others: yes					0.01 (0.023)	
Intercept	2.185*** (0.079)	1.52*** (0.104)	1.548*** (0.11)	1.581*** (0.106)	1.527*** (0.105)	1.527*** (0.104)
<i>Random part (standard deviations)</i>						
Country	0.42	0.39	0.39	0.4	0.39	0.4
Residual	1.19	1.14	1.14	1.14	1.14	1.14
AIC	133885.465	130692.231	130705.973	130691.167	130699.767	130686.625
BIC	133920.05	130839.218	130870.253	130846.801	130855.401	130842.259

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; ***; $p \leq 0.001$.

Set of controls: age in years and its square; employment status (employed as the reference, vs non-employed); position on the left-right scale (don't know as the reference; left, centre, and right); subjects' opinion on whether democracy is a good way of governing the country (very good as the reference vs fairly good, bad); and respondents' political and social engagement (no as the reference category, yes indicating that they belonged to at least one of the following: trade unions; political parties/groups; environment, ecology or animal rights groups; charitable/humanitarian organizations).

To provide an example of this variation, the difference between women and men was about -0.19 at the 10th percentile of the gender role attitude variable while it dropped to -0.08 at the 90th percentile. In other words, at higher levels of gender egalitarianism, both women and men justify illicit behaviour to a lesser extent.

A similar result occurred in terms of interest in politics: at lower levels of interest in politics, the gender gap was larger (-0.16), with men being more likely to support illicit behaviour. In contrast, among those interested in politics, the gap was smaller (-0.09), and support for such behaviour was lower among both genders. Overall, these results suggested only partial confirmation of our set of hypotheses: the gender gaps in the justifiability of illicit behaviour were indeed smaller among certain categories of subjects, namely the more gender-progressive (H2) and those interested in politics (H3b). In contrast, level of education and trust in others had less predictive power than expected and their effect did not vary by gender. As anticipated, the relationship between education, political attitudes, social capital and corruption is tricky to disentangle due to the multiplicity of factors that operate at the micro, meso and macro levels.

Before testing our last set of hypotheses concerning cross-national differences in the outcome, it is useful to provide some preliminary information on the variation across countries in the extent to which the respondents justified illicit behaviour. Figure 2 shows the predicted value of the civic immorality index alongside 95% confidence intervals calculated from Model 2. As can be seen, there is considerable cross-national variation in this respect, with predicted values ranging from 1.35 in Albania to over 3 in Spain, with a grand mean of 1.95. Interestingly, no clear geographical pattern emerged among the considered countries. For example, countries known to “go together” on other measures, such as the Nordic ones, were located very far from each other in this distribution, and the same occurred for the two southern European countries. It is not a new result (Hunady, 2017), however, suggesting that the context of the countries matters in its specific and multidimensional configuration.

[FIGURE 2 HERE]

A set of macro-level variables was included in the models to explain this cross-national variation, namely Control of Corruption, the Global Gender Gap Index and the Gini Index. None of these variables proved to be significantly associated with the outcome³. Therefore, we then tested whether there were cross-level interactions between gender and the three macro-level variables. As can be seen from Table 3, which only reports the coefficients for the main terms and the interactions of interest, the first two interactions were not

³ Analyses not shown but available upon request.

significant and, in the case of control of corruption the magnitude of the coefficients was also very small. The main term for the Gender Gap index was negative, as would be expected (i.e., in countries with higher gender equality, subjects justify illicit behaviour less), but non-significant, as was its interaction with gender. However, we found a positive cross-level interaction between the Gini index and gender. Interestingly, and contrary to our hypothesis, the main term for the Gini index was negative (albeit not significant)⁴ indicating that the respondents were less prone to justify illicit behaviour in countries with greater income inequality (Pop, 2012).

Table 3. Random intercept and random slope models. Dependent variables: justifiability of illicit behaviour. Standard errors in parentheses (N subjects = 42,037, N groups=30).

	Model 4	Model 5a	Model 5b	Model 5c
<i>Fixed part</i>				
Women	-0.126*** (0.019)	-0.128*** (0.019)	-0.126*** (0.02)	-0.128*** (0.018)
Control of corruption		0.007 (0.093)		
Women × control of corruption		-0.021 (0.02)		
GGI			-0.421 (1.719)	
Women × GGI			-0.002 (0.387)	
Gini				-0.28 (0.2)
Women × Gini				0.097* (0.043)
Intercept	1.515*** (0.112)	1.512*** (0.114)	1.514*** (0.113)	1.521*** (0.111)
<i>Random part (standard deviations)</i>				
Country	0.46	0.47	0.46	0.45
Gender	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.07
Residual	1.14	1.14	1.14	1.14
AIC	130677.86	130689.711	130679.346	130683.244
BIC	130842.14	130871.283	130860.919	130864.816
Note: * $p \leq 0.05$; ** $p \leq 0.01$; ***; $p \leq 0.001$. All models also include the control variables from Table 2.				

Against our hypothesis, the positive sign of the interaction indicated that at higher levels of income inequality, the gender gap in the extent to which subjects justified illicit behaviour was smaller. This result is better illustrated in Figure 3, which shows the predicted marginal effect of gender with 95% confidence intervals at all possible levels of Gini in our sample, alongside the random effects of gender estimated by model

⁴ It is worth noting that cross-national research has shown that individual characteristics affect the perception of corruption in the same manner in both low- and high-income countries (Gatti, Paternostro and Rigolini, 2003).

5c. As can be seen, gender gaps in the justifiability of illicit behaviour varied considerably across countries, and this variation was partially captured by the Gini index: on average, gender gaps were larger in countries with lower levels of income inequality and nearly disappeared at higher levels of inequality. Previous research has achieved similar conclusions (Pop, 2012).

[FIGURE 3 HERE]

<a>SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Do women still display a higher level of “civic morality” (Letki, 2006) than men across Europe? If so, to what extent are these “high moral standards” connected to the persisting social and political inequalities affecting women?

This chapter has aimed to give an answer based on empirical evidence at the micro level using the most recent wave of the European Values Study (2017–20). The data came from a sample of 30 countries. In line with previous research, we showed that in Europe the tendency of the large majority of men and woman is to affirm that corruption and other illicit behaviour are not justifiable. However, we found that while a gap exists across Europe in the extent to which women and men justify illicit behaviour, it is relatively small. We also demonstrated that the gap persists even when controlling for measures of gender role orientation, education, horizontal trust, and political engagement. Upon exploring the cross-national variation of the gender gap, we found that it remains limited in most contexts and that macro-level indicators such as gender equality and control of corruption did not account for cross-national variation in our measure, nor did they account for the gender differences therein. Only indicators of income inequality seemed to work.

This picture became more complex when we introduced the interaction terms to investigate the extent to which the gender gap in civic morality may be explained by persisting gendered inequalities regarding social roles. We showed that the gender gap is smaller for those adopting gender-egalitarian views. It is worth noting that, on the contrary, when gender interacted with macro-level gender equality (measured using the Global Gender Gap Index) no significant statistical effect was shown. In other words, the formation of attitudes towards corruption and other illicit behaviour involves gender roles that constrain choices more than institutions that enable women’s agency (Hobson et al., 2006). *Ceteris paribus*, men and women who feel free

from the cultural pressures of traditional gender roles display a similar level of civic morality. Similar results were found when we considered the interaction between gender and political participation, measured by a key antecedent such as political interest. Moreover, it should be considered that gender role socialization and political participation are strictly related. Recent cross-national research showed that “gender-friendly policies in Europe contribute to bridging the gender gap in political engagement only during adulthood, suggesting that childhood socialization seems to be more strongly affected by traditional family values than by policies promoting gender equality” (Fraile and Gomez, 2017, p. 601).

Therefore, hidden behind the “myth” of women’s incorruptibility (Esarey and Chirillo, 2013) are traditional (social, cultural, political) gender inequalities. The “fairer” sex is the result of an “unfair” system pervaded by gendered social norms and institutional barriers to women. As regards policy implications, it arouses a question for further investigation. To what extent is women’s higher intolerance of corruption a signal of the emergence of a form of gender-based recognition and resentment (Fukuyama, 2018)? Turning to the findings presented here, this argument could explain why the effect of the interaction between gender and macro-level income inequalities on the justifiability of corruption and other illicit behaviour was negative. One possible explanation could be rooted in the mechanism of resentment on the part of the “losers” in a framework of relative deprivation. Some scholars, for example, have shown that lower-status individuals are less likely to support inequalities in their society if they live in a context where meritocratic perceptions are prevalent (La Roex, Huijts and Sieben, 2019). In the same vein, women could be more likely to fight corruption in countries with less income inequality, because they are both barred from collusive (male) networks and economically more disadvantaged.

To conclude, as far as methodological implications are concerned, our findings encourage the use of cross-national survey data. Through research surveys we can open the “black box” of the nexus between gender and corruption, by testing specific mechanisms that consider individual determinants such as contextual conditionality (Wysmułek, 2019). However, it is worth noting that social desirability response bias could affect subjective measures of corruption. It is a problem well known to scholars analysing sensitive data in survey research (Jann et al., 2018) and generally taken into account by scholars investigating attitudes towards/perception of corruption (Torgler and Dong, 2008; Hunady, 2017; Agerberg, 2020). However, it is a particularly tricky matter for the topic investigated here. We know that women tend to display (in experimental

settings, such as answering survey questions) more ethical responses in several domains. At the same time, there is evidence that women are more susceptible to social desirability bias (Dalton and Ortegren, 2011). Given the small gender gap in the level of tolerance towards corruption, it is of stark importance to estimate the extent to which the former is a function of the latter. And it is especially so as the use of surveys to study corruption becomes more widespread (Wysmulek, 2019).

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Figures

Figure 1. Gender Equality and corruption. On the y-axis: Control over corruption as measured by the Worldwide Governance Indicators. On the x-axis: Societal gender equality measured with the Global Gender Gap Index (WEF 2020).

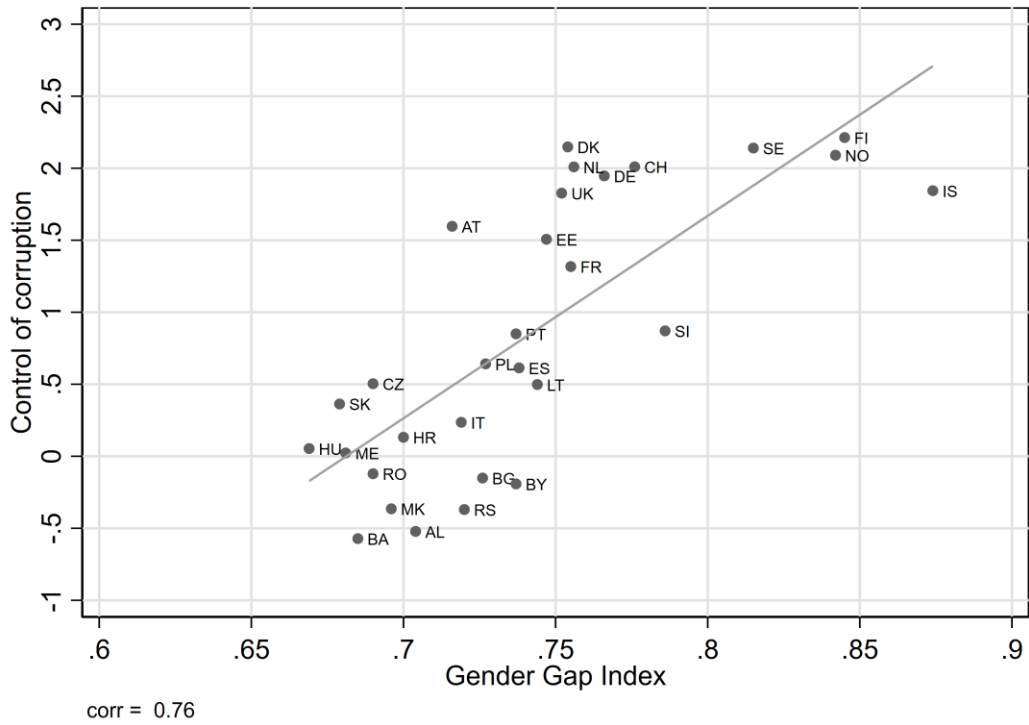


Figure 2. Predicted value of the civic immorality index with 95% confidence intervals by country. Predictions are calculated from Model 2.

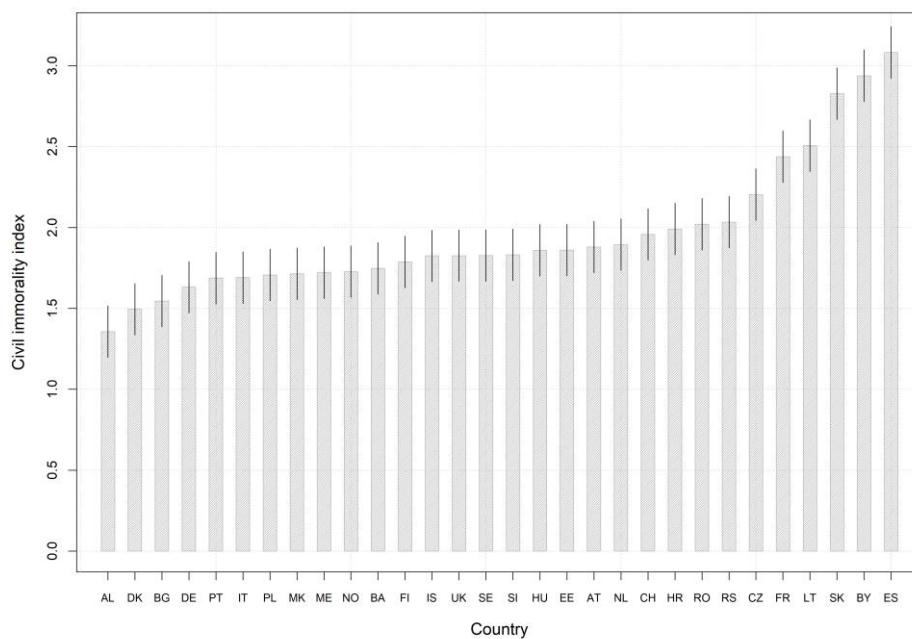


Figure 3. Random effects of gender and predicted marginal effect of gender with 95% confidence intervals against the Gini Index. Predictions are calculated from Model 5c

