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The temptation of the dark side: why women bribe differently than men

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have repeatedly argued that women engage less in corruption and bribery than men because they are more risk-averse. I argue that female risk-aversion can be offset by sufficiently high benefits from bribery and propose that these benefits vary depending on the area of government services. Previous authors have argued how the gender-interest mechanism prevents women from engaging in grand corruption and how female representation improves government service provision in Europe. Looking through a different lens, I provide a systematic micro-level argument for how the gender-interest mechanism can stimulate petty corruption. Using Afrobarometer data (2011–2013, 2014–2015, 34–36 countries), I find that women are less frequently involved in bribery than men in relation to general government services but equally involved in the health and education sector.

Introduction

Most research in political science and economics suggests that women are generally less involved in corruption than men, and countries with more women in parliament or the workforce tend to have lower levels of (grand) corruption.[1] However, laboratory studies sometimes find no significant difference in bribery behaviour between genders (e.g. Alatas et al. 2009; Guerra and Zhuravleva 2022). The academic debate remains divided, with mechanisms behind the gender-corruption link still underexplored (Guerra and Zhuravleva 2022).[2] This paper aims to reconcile these conflicting findings by proposing a theoretical explanation and providing large-N empirical evidence using Afrobarometer data (2011–2013, 2014–2015; 34–36 countries).

My argument suggests that women evaluate the costs and benefits of engaging in corruption differently than men. I assume that both *bribe-payers* and *bribe-takers/*

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accepters conduct a cost–benefit analysis before participating in petty corruption. Women are generally more risk-averse than men (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Esarey and Chirillo 2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018; Lee and Guven 2013; Watson and Moreland 2014), which makes them perceive the potential risks of punishment for corruption as higher. I also propose that women gain greater benefits from health and educational services than men, but similar benefits from general governmental services[3] due to differing interests (a gender-interest mechanism). As a result, women are less likely to engage in corruption for general government services but not necessarily for health and school services.

Building on existing explanations (Alexander and Ravnik 2015; Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019; Neudorfer 2016; Watson and Moreland 2014), I propose that women's differing political, economic, and social interests affect their engagement in corruption. It also aligns with prior work suggesting that women are generally more risk-averse than men, leading them to engage less in corruption or bribery (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Esarey and Chirillo 2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018, 2019; Rivas 2013). However, my contribution is distinct in suggesting that these gender-interest differences influence bribe-payers in everyday petty corruption, not just bribe-takers or grand corruption. Specifically, my novel proposition is that women's interest in education and healthcare can offset their typical risk-aversion, leading them to engage in bribery as frequently as men when seeking access to these services.[4] Yet, women are less likely than men to bribe for general government services.

In the empirical part, I use survey data from the Afrobarometer rounds 6, carried out 2014–2015 for up to 36 countries, and 5 carried out 2011–2013 for up to 34 countries in Africa with up to 34,039 observations in the statistical models.[5] My statistical results suggest that women's engagement in bribery varies depending on the kind of governmental service studied. There is robust empirical evidence to suggest that women engage less than men in bribery for general government services and equally for education services. The statistical results are mixed in the area of bribery for health services where women are sometimes less involved in bribery and sometimes equally involved in bribery as men.

My findings are partially consistent with recent research by Dietrich and Neudorfer (2024), who identify gendered patterns in bribery engagement. Their analysis of global survey data suggests that women are less involved in bribery in general. I take this work further by looking at different government service area in detail. Further, my work also extends the experimental results of Guerra and Zhuravleva (2022), who found that 'increasing the benefits of corruption makes females more likely to offer bribes' (186). Together, these studies emphasize the nuanced gender dynamics at play in corrupt practices.

In the following sections, I review the literature, present a novel argument and hypothesis on gender effects in bribery across different government services, outline the research design, present results, and discuss the findings and their broader implications.

State of the art

Overall, the observable trend in the gender and corruption research seems to be that researchers have increasingly moved away from a macro-level theory and country-level

analysis of broad corruption measures–i.e. the Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti (2001) and Swamy et al. (2001) approach–toward more fine-grained corruption data on different areas of corruption (Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019), subnational-level corruption data (Bauhr and Charron 2018), individual-level survey corruption data (Alhassan-Alolo 2007; Dietrich and Neudorfer 2024; Lee and Guven 2013) or experiments (Guerra and Zhuravleva 2022), or a combination of survey and experiment methods (Chaudhuri et al. 2024).

Although the empirical evidence has been rather consistently finding that women engage less in corruption than men (see Hao, Chang, and Sun 2018), the academic jury is still out on why women are less corrupt than men. Possible explanations range from women are being 'naturally' less corrupt than men, or whether the political system or other contextual factors are the actual cause of lower corruption levels in countries with more women in the parliament/workforce (Stensöta and Wängnerud 2018), or a bit of both (Alexander and Bågenholm 2018): women and contextual factors both matter. By highlighting the *bribe-payer* side of corruption, my argument shines some light on the side of corruption that usually is less focused on but is highly relevant to fully understand the relationship between gender[6] and corruption. I will structure the literature review into three categories. While alternative approaches exist, this organization provides a strong foundation for understanding the small but novel contribution of my argument.

The gender group of arguments propose that women 'naturally' engage less in corruption, have different 'interests', or are expected to 'behave' in a different way than men. This academic debate can be traced to two pioneering works: Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti (2001) and Swamy et al. (2001). Whereas in the beginning, the arguments regarding why women should engage less in corruption than men were rather simple, over the course of the debate, researchers developed the attributes they assigned to women and why they made women engage less in corruption or bribery. All of them, however, propose in common that society affects how (1) women see themselves, (2) men and women expect women to behave, and (3) everyone thinks the 'nature' of women is supposed to be. For instance, society expects women to be *motherly* and *closer to the children* (Holmgren 2015; Stensöta, Wängnerud, and Svensson 2015), to act according to *moral values*, *ethical standards*, and *social norms* (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Esarey and Chirillo 2013; Goetz 2007; Holmgren 2015), to be more *trust-worthy* (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Goetz 2007; Watson and Moreland 2014)[7] and *risk-averse* (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018; Harris, Jenkins, and Glaser 2006; Rivas 2013), to have more *self-control* (Stensöta, Wängnerud, and Svensson 2015); women are often *held to a higher standard* by voters (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018), particularly *female voters* (Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018). All these attributes are argued to make women, on average, less likely to engage in bribery, because corruption requires breaking the rules, risk-taking, ruthless or selfish behaviour. Engaging in corruption then runs orthogonal to the expectations and characteristics that a society associates with women.[8]

Most of these arguments focus on why individual women might engage less in corruption (micro-level) but often consider macro-level conditions and data to test their hypotheses. For example, Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti (2001) suggest that women are more trustworthy and public-spirited, leading to more honest behaviour in public office. They test this by analysing the percentage of women in parliament alongside macro-level corruption data. This approach follows the positivistic tradition in social science, where

macro-level hypotheses are tested using econometric methods, grounded in micro-level explanations of causal mechanisms, a framework systematized by Coleman (1994).

In line with trends in other areas of political science, the research on gender and corruption has also experienced a shift from macro-level testing with micro-level explanations towards more micro-level testing using survey data (Dietrich and Neudorfer 2024) and experiments, even in corruption research (Alatas et al. 2009; Frank, Lambsdorff, and Boehm 2011; Guerra and Zhuravleva 2022; Rivas 2013; Schulze and Frank 2003), or a combination of both methods (Chaudhuri et al. 2024).

Whereas the aforementioned authors propose arguments outlining a direct effect of gender on corruption, arguments based on a gender-interest mechanism propose an indirect effect of gender on corruption by arguing that women and men have different political interests that move activity and funding and therefore rent-seeking opportunities away from areas that are more prone to corruption (Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019; Neudorfer 2016; Watson and Moreland 2014). This argument addresses both the role of women in parliament and female voters. It links gender and corruption to the literature on descriptive and substantive representation, which suggests that female politicians are key to gender-equalizing reforms, though the relationship can be complex (Lowande, Ritchie, and Lauterbach 2019; Nwankwor 2021; Wängnerud 2009). Research shows that female parliamentarians often focus on 'female topics' in parliamentary debates (Bäck and Debus 2019; Wäckerle and Castanho Silva 2023). Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud (2019) find that 'female representatives seek to further two separate political agendas once they attain public office: the improvement of public service delivery in sectors that tend to primarily benefit women; and the breakup of male-dominated collusive networks' (Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019, 1043).

The second argument examines female voters and their influence on public spending decisions related to corruption. Unlike the previous focus on women in parliament, this perspective highlights that female voters can support representatives of either gender who align with their interests.[9] Neudorfer (2016) contends that working women represent a unique electorate group that advocates for increased public spending on healthcare, childcare, and education, thereby limiting government funds for areas more susceptible to grand corruption, such as military expenditure.

The system group of arguments suggests that the relationship between women and corruption is spurious and caused by the political system, namely, liberal democracy, which leads to both good governance and gender equality (Sung 2003). Not all research consistently found democracies to be associated with lower levels of corruption but establishes that the democracy and gender effect vanished when controlling for anti-corruption laws (Holmgren 2015).

The proponents of a joint effect of system and sex suggest both are important. They argue that the political system or other (socioeconomic) factors condition the gender effect on corruption, meaning women are equally corrupt when they have access to the right networks or are in a society that necessitates corruption. Researchers suggested that the gender effect might be *culturally driven* (Alatas et al. 2009; Esarey and Chirillo 2013) so that in some countries, such as Australia, the gender differences are very strong, unlike in others, such as India (Chaudhuri et al. 2024 for attitudes towards corruption and experienced politicians but not inexperienced politicians, Alatas et al. 2009 for engagement in bribery). Others propose that women are less corrupt than men because they do not have

access to (male corruption) *networks* (Chaudhuri et al. 2024; Goetz 2007; Rivas 2013; Stockemer 2011; Stockemer and Sundström 2019)[10],[11] or they suggest that the relationship between gender and corruption depends on the *political system* being democratic or autocratic (Esarey and Chirillo 2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018).[12] However, the exact conditions that determine the observed differences between male and female citizens remain unclear (Esarey and Valdes 2023) and require further research (e.g. Alatas et al. 2009). Esarey and Valdes (2023) propose that differing contexts may explain these varying theoretical interpretations.

One explanation for the varying effects of gender on corruption across political systems is that the risks associated with bribery and accountability differ. As Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2018) note, the link between greater women's representation and lower perceived corruption will be strongest in democracies with high electoral accountability, specifically: '(1) where corruption is not the norm, (2) where press freedom is respected, (3) in parliamentary systems and (4) under personalistic electoral rules' (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018, 659). While the political context is clearly important, more theories are needed to explain individual-level mechanisms. I propose examining contextual factors by focusing on bribes for different government services: general government, health, and education.

Both bribe payers and acceptors are crucial to understanding corruption, and experiments show that gender influences both sides (e.g. Alatas et al. 2009 for bribe payers). While the *bribe-acceptor*'s side has received more attention (see Li 2019, 45), the *bribe-payer*'s side remains underexplored. We often assume *bribe-payers* are always willing participants, but survey data reveals otherwise, with experts overestimating public engagement in bribery (Fisman and Golden 2017). Since corruption involves both parties and we lack insight into the bribe-payer's motives, my article contributes to filling this gap by focusing on why bribe-payers engage in bribery.

This study contributes to the literature in two ways: First, it introduces a new theoretical argument explaining why women engage in bribery differently – both from men and depending on the benefits they expect.[13] Building on theories that highlight gendered differences in interests (Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019; Watson and Moreland 2014), I argue that in some areas, women perceive greater benefits from bribery, making them as corrupt as men in healthcare and education services but less so in general government services. Second, using experienced corruption data from Africa (in contrast to Europe like Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019 or Lee and Guven 2013 did), this study adds new evidence by focusing on actual bribe payments, complementing the experimental and perception-based data commonly used in corruption research. It also addresses a gap in the literature, where 'much of empirical work on the determinants of corruption is primarily based on macro-level evidence (…)' (Korosteleva, Mickiewicz, and Stępień-Baig 2020, 851).

Theoretical argument and hypotheses

Do women really engage less in corrupt or bribery than men? No, not necessarily. My argument suggests that women engage less in bribery than men in some situations but not in others, because not all forms of corruption and areas of bribery are the same. Generally, my argument assumes that women exhibit higher levels of risk-aversion compared to men (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Chaudhuri et al. 2024; Esarey and Chirillo

2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018; Lee and Guven 2013; Watson and Moreland 2014), and that this heightened risk-aversion remains consistent across all areas of government provision, including general services, healthcare, and education. However, when a particular service is of significant importance or benefit to women, they may feel compelled to resort to bribery to 'solve a problem'. While the degree of risk-aversion remains constant, I contend that the perceived level of benefit derived from different areas of government services varies, influencing their behaviour accordingly.

Corrupt actors weigh costs and benefits

This paper focuses on *petty corruption*, where citizens bribe government officials for services (e.g. driver's licenses, healthcare access, school placements) or to evade punishments (e.g. speeding tickets). In contrast, *grand corruption* involves interest groups influencing legislation or securing large contracts illegally. Bribery is typically illicit (Rivas 2013) and occurs between two parties: the bribe-payer (*corrupter*) and the bribe-taker (*corruptee*), who both conduct a cost-benefit analysis (Neudorfer 2018). While research has primarily centred on *bribe-takers*,[14,15] understanding *bribe-payers* is also crucial for assessing a country's corruption level. For corruption to occur, the benefits must outweigh the costs for both parties (Neudorfer 2018). In petty corruption, bribe-payers seek to maximize benefits, preferring to achieve their goals without bribery due to potential costs. In 2018, an estimated $3.6 trillion was spent on bribery (WEF 2018).

Bribe-takers can be government officials/civil servants at various governmental tiers who are supposed to provide a general or specific governmental service. For bribe-takers, 'the main cost of corruption is the possibility of getting caught and punished' (Fisman and Golden, 2017, 122). On the benefit side, I assume that the more income a civil servant generates the happier they are (Fisman and Golden 2017). Once the potential cost arising from punishment, and its likelihood, exceeds the bribe's expected payoff, potential bribe-takers will not accept a bribe.

Cost of engaging in corruption

The cost for bribe-payers engaging in corruption depends on the likelihood and severity of negative outcomes (Harris, Jenkins, and Glaser 2006). Bribe-paying is thus a risk-negative-return decision, where individuals weigh the 'trade-off between fear (risk) and hope (expected returns)' (Harris, Jenkins, and Glaser 2006, 50). While this is an individual choice, societal factors – such as cultural acceptance of corruption, the political climate, and the strength of the rule of law – affect everyone similarly. Additionally, general trends show that women are more risk-averse than men.[16]

Studies indicate that women engage less in corrupt practices due to higher risk-aversion.[17] For example, girls are more likely to avoid risky situations (like cycling without a helmet), while boys tend to take risks unless they perceive severe potential injuries (Hillier and Morrongiello 1998). Furthermore, men often view risky situations as challenges, while women see them as threats (Croson and Gneezy 2009).

Previous research suggests that gender socialization differs for boys and girls, and this may shape their engagement in corruption. Specifically, girls are often raised with expectations to take on caregiving roles, both within families and professionally, which could

influence their engagement in corruption (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Goetz 2007). This socialization process might affect not only how women perceive and respond to risky situations but also why they derive higher benefits from certain government services compared to others (as discussed in the next section). By internalizing caregiving responsibilities, women may feel more compelled to engage in bribery for health and education services than men (as outlined in the next section).

Participating in bribery can be punished by jail time and, consequently, loss of income; a substantial fine set by a judge; or social ostracism caused by the revelation of the act itself or through jail time. Countries around the world commonly have legislation in place to punish bribe-payers and bribe-takers with jail time or a variety of fines and there is evidence of corruption being punished by courts (see Li 2019, 44). For instance, in Ghana 'Corruption is illegal and both agent and principal are liable'.[18]

Benefits of engaging in corruption

Bribe-payers engage in bribery because they want (quicker) access to a specific government service they would otherwise not have at all or not as quickly as they want. My novel argument is that there are gender differences in the benefit or value men and women derive from these government services. I propose that whereas the average female and male bribe-payer values the benefits from access to a general government service similarly, on average women value benefits from school and health services higher than men.[19] This increases women's willingness to pay a bribe to acquire health and education services.[20]

There are two crucial aspects that need to be evident for this argument to hold. First, it needs to be plausible and substantiated by evidence that women value government services around health care and education more than men. Second, we need to see evidence that women have the opportunity, interest and means to make decisions in this area.

My argument rests on the proposition that, on average, all others things being equal women care about, value and benefit from healthcare and education spending more than men. In many societies, typically, a large share of women's daily tasks involves taking care of child and/or elderly relatives. Although the role of women in most Western societies has substantially changed over the last 50 years, women still spend more time on routine housework (which includes caring, preparing food, providing shelter, and clothing) than men (Coltrane 2000) even if women have jobs outside the house or a career similar to their partners (Känsälä and Oinas 2016). Girls' upbringing and education still often revolves around traditional responsibilities such as motherhood, childcare, or being a wife (Bleck and Michelitch 2018).

When people value something, they engage with it and work to improve it (Bleck and Michelitch 2018). This is evident in public opinion and policy outcomes, with health care and education often cited in gender and corruption research as examples of the gender interest mechanism (Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019; Peiffer and Rose 2018). Studies show that female legislators tend to prioritize social spending, especially in health care and to a lesser extend for education (Clayton et al. 2019; Mechkova and Carlitz 2021). Research also indicates that women are concerned about government spending on education and healthcare (Bleck and Michelitch 2018), with surveys showing strong support for increased education funding in Ghana and Sudan

(Afrobarometer round 6, 2017). Female politicians often focus on issues that matter to women, including traditional responsibilities like childcare and motherhood (Bleck and Michelitch 2018; Bolzendahl 2009). Afrobarometer 5 data also highlights that children were more likely to be present during interviews with women (3,985) than men (1,784).

Women's concern for healthcare and education translates into action. In Ghana, women actively participate in society and the economy, independently earning and spending money (Chao 1999; Doss 2001). They make key decisions about their own and their children's healthcare and schooling (Ford et al. 2019). A mother's education significantly impacts her child's health (Keats 2018) and schooling outcomes (Garcia-Penalo and Konte 2014). Women benefit more from health and education services because their children's success directly impacts their well-being, and they are more reliant on public healthcare (Hossain et al. 2010). Healthy, educated children also give mothers more time for personal pursuits and future support.

Based on the argumentation provided above on a constant difference in gender risk-aversion as well as gendered different benefit derivation from health and school services, I derive the following hypotheses:

> *Hypothesis 1*: Women are less likely than men to bribe a government official in general government services.

> *Hypothesis 2*: There are no significant differences between men and women with respect to paying a bribe to a government *official (a) for a school service/school placement or (b) for a health service.*

Research design

My argument posits that women perceive the costs and benefits of corrupt interactions differently than men, leading to varied engagement in corruption. The empirical analysis examines whether there are statistically significant differences in bribery across three areas of government services: general, healthcare, and education. The available data allow for testing the relationship between the gender of bribe-payers and their engagement in corruption. However, current data limitations hinder a rigorous empirical test of the causal mechanism at the micro level – specifically, whether women perceive costs and benefits differently for various government services. If I find differing correlations that support my causal claim, my research design can be viewed as a hoop test (Van Evera 1997), where failing to find the proposed relationship would imply the absence of a causal effect.

If I find support for the gendered relationship, other valid theoretical explanations may still exist. Once appropriate data become available, future research can directly test the causal mechanism without relying on evidence consistent with my claim or alternative explanations. This conventional approach of inferential statistics for observational studies is also employed by Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud (2019), Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti (2001), Esarey and Chirillo (2013), Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2018), and Watson and Moreland (2014).

The sample

To test the proposed hypotheses, I examine decisions made by individual women and men in the sample, like others did before me in other areas or gender and corruption

research, shifting the focus from macro-level analyses to a micro-level perspective.[21] I use survey data from a stratified probability sample of the Afrobarometer rounds 5 and 6 for 34 and 36 countries (1200–2400 observations per country),[22] respectively, in Africa.[23] The Afrobarometer surveys currently provide the best available operationalization of bribe-paying in different areas of government services to test the proposed hypotheses at level of individuals.

Given the limitation of data availability on bribery question for other regions of the world (as well as the absence of theoretical expectation concerning interaction effects), this article does not aim for generalizability across all contexts but instead seeks to provide valuable insights specific to Africa. As demonstrated by numerous context-specific studies, such as those conducted single or regional specific studies on the relationship of gender and corruption/bribery in Australia and India (Alatas et al. 2009), Italy (Guerra and Zhuravleva 2022) or in Europe, (e.g. Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019) can significantly enrich the broader academic discourse. Yet to account for contextual effects, the statistical models include contextual controls as the national level.

Operationalization of the variables

For general government services I use the following question: 'And how often, if ever, did you have to pay a bribe, give a gift, or do a favour for a government official, [for a teacher or school official [Q55B], for a health worker or clinic or hospital staff [Q55D]] in order to get the document you needed?' (Q55F of round 6, Afrobarometer),[24,25] which has been used in previous research to measure corruption (Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014; Peiffer and Rose 2018). Respondents were able to choose from the following answer categories: never, once or twice, a few times, often, or no contact. The statistical analysis only includes respondents who state in the survey that they had had contact with government officials and excluded those that had no contact (following Peiffer and Rose 2018).[26] Retaining respondents who did not have any contact with government officials would artificially inflate no-bribery cases and thereby bias the results. All questions were asked in the strictest confidence (Afrobarometer 2019).

It should be noted that experience-based data from surveys can be problematic as respondents might fear punishment for their responses and misreport corruption if there is lack of freedom of press. To make sure that the results are not subject to a specific point in time, I look at Afrobarometer rounds 5 (2011–2013) and 6 (2014–2015).[27] Typically, the bias in reporting corruption is a downward bias, meaning individuals are more likely to underreport bribery rather than overstate it. This bias would affect all areas of government services equally, so the gender differences in reporting bribery across general government services, health, and education should remain consistent across respondents. Therefore, while underreporting may be a general issue in bribery data, it should not invalidate the findings regarding the varying gender effects nor affect the conclusion of this study.

I recoded all three corruption variables into dummy variables so that respondents were categorized as not paying a bribe (value zero–former value zero) or paying a bribe (value one–former value once or twice, a few times, or often).[28] There are two reasons for the recoding: first, the argument only makes predictions for engaging or not engaging in corruption, and not about how often citizens engage in corruption. Second, the variation

between the different categories in each country is not large enough to allow for an ordered logit or ordered probit estimation.[29] When running the analysis with the original data as an ordered logit regression, the Brant test for the parallel regression assumption fails, which makes the statistical results invalid.

To measure gender, I use question Q101, from rounds 6 and 5, 'Gender of respondent', and recode the binary variable so that the value zero identifies men and one identifies women. Besides the theoretical reasoning for why the control variables included influence people to engage in corruption, I use statistical model fit measures – Pseudo R^2, AIC, BIC–to determine what set of control variables best explains the variation in the dependent variable.

Gender is not the sole determinant of an individual's likelihood of engaging in bribery. Drawing on insights from the existing literature, the empirical analysis incorporates a set of control variables to account for alternative explanations. These control variables were chosen based on previous research that analyzed the causes of bribery, both in general and within the specific context of Afrobarometer data. This way, this study's empirical findings can be compared with previous findings. The following control variables are expected to increase the likelihood of bribery. *Contact with a political party*,[30] which has previously been included as a control variable for engagement in bribery using Afrobarometer data (Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014) and as a control for vote buying (Jensen and Justesen 2014). *Employment*, used as a control variable for engagement in bribery (Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014; Lee and Guven 2013) and for vote buying (Jensen and Justesen 2014). *Level of education*, which has been found to increase corruption (Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014; Lee and Guven 2013) and has also been used as a control variable for vote buying analysed using Afrobarometer data (Jensen and Justesen 2014). *Poverty*, which increases the likelihood of engaging in bribery (Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014; Rodrigues-Neto 2014). At the country level, higher GDP per capita has been found to reduce corruption (Nwabuzor 2005).[31] *Membership in a community*, which has been found to increase corruption (Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014) and has been used as a control variable in previous research (Swamy et al. 2001). *Difficulty in accessing a service*, with Lee and Guven (2013) using a variable on the difficulty of borrowing money as a proxy.

I expect the following variables to reduce bribery: *religiosity* is expected to lower the likelihood of citizens paying bribes (Lee and Guven 2013), Justesen and Bjørnskov (2014) examined membership in a religious organization and found mixed results, with religiosity both encouraging and discouraging corruption and *urban areas* (Justesen and Bjørnskov 2014); used as a control for vote buying (Jensen and Justesen 2014), and percentage of rural population was found to increase corruption (Lee and Guven 2013). Exact questions are provided in Table A.26. Correlation tables are provided in Tables A.24 and A.25. None of the explanatory variables has extremely high correlation that would suggest multicollinearity.

Descriptive statistics show that there is variation for all three corruption areas general government service, health and medical services, education. Not all citizens always bribe or always abstain from bribery but there is variation among citizens, men and women. Thus, citizens engage in corruption differently. Descriptive statistics are available in Tables A.1 and A.2 in the online appendix.

The statistical analysis incorporates individual-level control variables to account for confounding factors at the individual-level. Additionally, to capture the contextual

factors influencing individual responses, I control for country-level gender equality and corruption (see for instance Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019 for contextual factors on the second level) using the *Varieties of Democracy* (V-Dem) indicators, along with a *specific* gender equality measure tailored to the government service area the individual is accessing (i.e. *Global Gender Gap Index*).[32] These controls are integrated as second-level contextual variables within a multi-level framework, ensuring that the analysis remains robust while maintaining the study's original focus.[33]

The study uses widely recognized indicators from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset to measure contextual variables on country-level, specifically relying on the V-Dem gender composite index for gender equality and V-Dem corruption indices.[34] These measures were chosen due to their extensive country coverage and compatibility with Afrobarometer data.

I estimate a logit regression and several multi-level logit regressions (part of the maximum likelihood estimation family) to test my hypotheses and include first, country dummies (logit) in Model 1, 5, 9 of Tables 1 and 2, second, country fixed effects (multi-level model)[35] to control for contextual factors in general and unit heterogeneity in Model 2, 6, 10 of Tables 1 and 2 as well as third, country level contextual factors in the form of general levels of corruption and gender equality as well as survey weights but random country effects (not country fixed effects)[36] (use of survey weights and Afrobarometer see Watkins 2022) for Model 3–4, 7–8, 11–12 of Tables 1 and 2.

Empirical results

If women were always less corrupt than men, we would expect to see gender differences in all models independent of the three different dependent corruption variables. Yet, we see varying results for the effect of gender on corruption. Women consistently engage less in corruption than men when it comes to general government services (supports hypothesis 1 – Models 1–4 in Tables 1 and 2), equally corrupt as men in school services (supports hypothesis 2a – Models 5–8 in Tables 1 and 2), and sometimes engage less in corruption than and sometimes equally corrupt as men (mixed support for hypothesis 2b – Models 9–12 in Tables 1 and 2). The fit of the statistical models varies between a pseudo R^2 of 0.12 for Table 1 and 0.23 for Table 2, which is relatively close to 0.2. Values of 0.2 of pseudo R^2 are usually considered a very good fit (McFadden 1979).

Table 1[37] summarizes the empirical results for bribes paid for a general governmental, health, and education services for round 6 of the Afrobarometer (2017) and Table 2 for round 5 of the Afrobarometer (2015). For further illustration, Figures 1–3 present the marginal gender effects and beta coefficients in graphical form. Negative marginal effects mean women are less likely to pay a bribe. Control variables are kept at their average values (mean or medium) while calculating the marginal effects. Figure 1a-c shows predicted probabilities for men and women to pay bribes in the three areas of government services (for Table 1); Figure 2 shows marginal effects of gender on the likelihood of paying a bribe in the three areas of government service (for Table 1); Figure 3 illustrates all coefficients with confidence bounds (for Table 1).

Model 1 of Table 1 and Figures 1a and 2 show that women are on average -2.6% less likely to engage in bribing a government officer for a general service than men–with a confidence interval from −3.8% to −1.4%. Similarly, the other multilevel models show

Table 1. Effect of gender on bribing government officials for government, school, and health services for round 6.

	Government Services (Dependent Variable) Paying a bribe to government official to access general government services (0 = no 1 = yes)				School Services (Dependent Variable) Paying a bribe to government official to access educational services (0 = no 1 = yes)				Health Services (Dependent Variable) Paying a bribe to government official to access healthcare services (0 = no 1 = yes)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Estimation Procedure	logit FE Country i.country	Melogit || country:	Melogit || country: GGGI Vdem Cor	Melogit || country: Vdem Cor	logit FE Country i.country	Melogit || country:	Melogit || country: GGGI Vdem Cor	Melogit || country: Vdem Cor	logit FE Country i.country	Melogit || country:	Melogit || country: GGGI Vdem Cor	Melogit || country: Vdem Cor
Women = 1	−0.21**	−0.21**	−0.19**	−0.23**	−0.01	−0.01	0.01	−0.01	−0.10*	−0.10*	−0.10*	−0.10*
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Constant	−3.76**	−3.58**	−3.73**	−3.68**	−3.38**	−3.54**	−3.69**	−3.59**	−3.60**	−3.71**	−3.91**	−3.79**
	(0.24)	(0.35)	(0.42)	(0.27)	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.38)	(0.34)	(0.25)	(0.34)	(0.40)	(0.36)

Control variables included in all models but not printed in this table (a full table is included in the online appendix): Level of education, member of community, religious, urban, employment status, contact with political party, gone without food, gone without cooking fuel, enough clean water, gone without a cash income, gone without medical care, unfair treatment, government officials perceived to be corrupt, difficulty obtaining a government service, difficulty obtaining a school service, difficulty obtaining a health service, age.

Table 1. Continued

Country-level effects

|									
Country Constant	1.55* (0.66)	1.04* (0.47)	0.78** (0.23)	1.12** (0.34)	0.57** (0.18)	0.56** (0.17)	1.70** (0.62)	0.87* (0.35)	0.88*** (0.33)
Gender Equality (GGGI)		1.04* (0.47)			0.57** (0.18)			0.87* (0.35)	
Corruption (Vdem)		1.04* (0.47)	0.78** (0.23)		0.57** (0.18)	0.56** (0.17)		0.87* (0.35)	0.88*** (0.33)
Gender Equality (Vdem)			0.78** (0.23)			0.56** (0.17)			0.88*** (0.33)
Observations	17989	16621	18367	16654	18367	17038	15032	23653	24206	21630	24206
Margins (Women = 0–1) C.L.	−0.038	−0.033	−0.035	−0.012	−0.037	−0.008	−0.007	−0.020	−0.017	−0.016	−0.016
Margins (Women = 0–1)	−0.026	−0.020	−0.025	−0.001	−0.024	−0.001	0.001	−0.010	−0.009	−0.008	−0.009
Margins (Women = 0–1) C.H.	−0.014	−0.007	−0.015	0.011	−0.010	0.007	0.009	−0.001	−0.001	−0.000	−0.001
Pseudo R²	0.262			0.215				0.226			
LR²	2639	3026	1848	1905	2287	3135	10019	3150	2562	1123	1487	1122
McFadden R²	0.26			0.22				0.23			
Adjusted McFadden R²	0.26			0.21				0.22			
AIC	13813	13840	11430	13924	12367	11523	9980	11523	15737	15855	13967	15856
ICC-Confidence Interval	0.21–0.48	0.13–0.29	0.18–0.39	0.14–0.39	0.10–0.25	0.10–0.25	0.24–0.52	0.24–0.52	0.13–0.36	0.14–0.37
ICC	0.33	0.20	0.28	0.24	0.17	0.16	0.37	0.23	0.22	0.24

Note:+significant at 10; *significant at 5; **significant at 1. Estimations performed using Stata 18.

Table 2. Effect of gender on bribing government officials for government, school, and health services for round 5.

	Government Services (Dependent Variable) Paying a bribe to government official to access general government services (0 = no 1 = yes)				School Services (Dependent Variable) Paying a bribe to government official to access educational services (0 = no 1 = yes)				Health Services (Dependent Variable) Paying a bribe to government official to access healthcare services (0 = no 1 = yes)			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
Estimation Procedure	logit FE Country i.country	Melogit || country:	Melogit || country: GGGI Vdem Cor	Melogit || country: Vdem Vdem Cor	logit FE Country i.country	Melogit || country:	Melogit || country: GGGI Vdem Cor	Melogit || country: Vdem Vdem Cor	logit FE Country i.country	Melogit || country:	Melogit || country: GGGI Vdem Cor	Melogit || country: Vdem Vdem Cor
Women = 1	−0.26**	−0.26**	−0.24**	−0.27**	0.02	0.02	−0.01	0.02	−0.00	−0.00	−0.04	−0.00
	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.05)	(0.04)
Constant	−1.59**	−2.12**	−2.52**	−2.12**	−3.40**	−3.13**	−3.44**	−3.11**	−3.21**	−2.64**	−3.08**	−2.64**
	(0.17)	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.34)	(0.37)	(0.35)	(0.17)	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.33)

Control variables included in all models but not printed in this table (a full table is included in the online appendix): Level of education, member of community, religious, urban, employment status, contact with political party, gone without food, gone without cooking fuel, enough clean water, gone without a cash income, gone without medical care, unfair treatment, government officials perceived to be corrupt, difficulty obtaining a government service, difficulty obtaining a school service, difficulty obtaining a health service, age.

Table 2. Continued

Country-level effects

|	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
Country Constant	0.79**	0.48**	0.40**	0.95**	0.47**	0.50**	1.34**	0.60**	0.69**
	(0.26)	(0.17)	(0.11)	(0.26)	(0.17)	(0.14)	(0.43)	(0.22)	(0.22)
Gender Equality (GGGI)		0.48**			0.47**			0.60**	
		(0.17)			(0.17)			(0.22)	
Corruption (Vdem)		0.48**	0.40**		0.47**	0.50**		0.60**	0.69**
		(0.17)	(0.11)		(0.17)	(0.14)		(0.22)	(0.22)
Gender Equality (Vdem)			0.40**			0.50**			0.69**
			(0.11)			(0.14)			(0.22)
Observations	21833	17481	21833	24150	18973	24150	27520	21745	27520
Margins (Women = 0–1) C.L.	−0.057	−0.053	−0.055	−0.007	−0.012	−0.007	−0.010	−0.015	−0.011
Margins (Women = 0–1)	−0.042	−0.038	−0.043	0.002	−0.001	0.002	−0.001	−0.005	−0.001
Margins (Women = 0–1) C.H.	−0.026	−0.022	−0.031	0.011	0.009	0.010	0.009	0.006	0.009
Pseudo R^2	0.123		0.161			0.168			
LR^2	1919	3964	952	1883	12866	2664	1510	4200	1512
	908		2199		1891				
McFadden R^2	0.12		0.16			0.17			
Adjusted McFadden R^2	0.12		0.16			0.16			
AIC	22648	17946	22506	18248	13963	23668	23778	18189	23779
	22747		18155		18249				
ICC-Confidence Interval	0.11–0.31	0.07–0.23	0.07–0.17	0.14–0.33	0.07–0.22	0.08–0.21	0.18–0.43	0.10–0.28	0.10–0.28
ICC	0.19	0.13	0.11	0.22	0.13	0.13	0.29	0.17	0.17

Note:+significant at 10; *significant at 5; **significant at 1. Estimations performed using Stata 18.
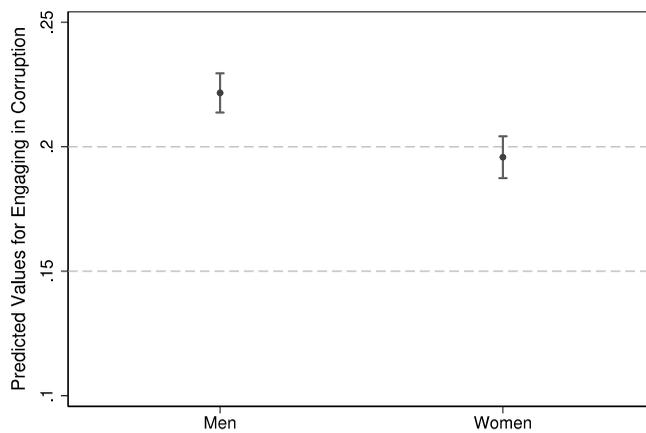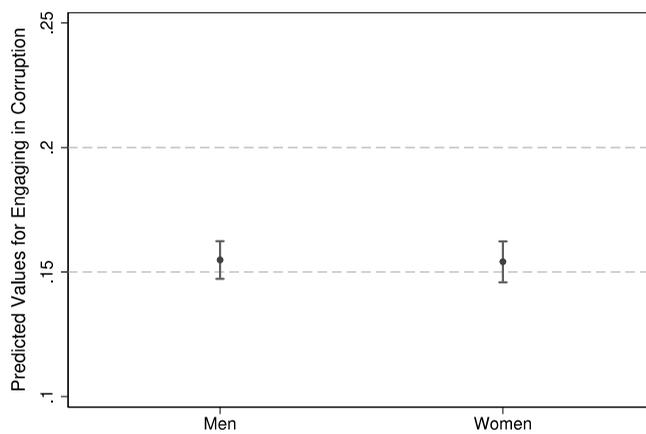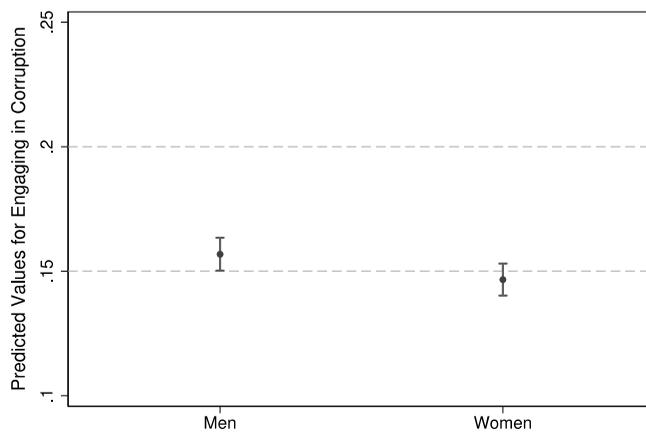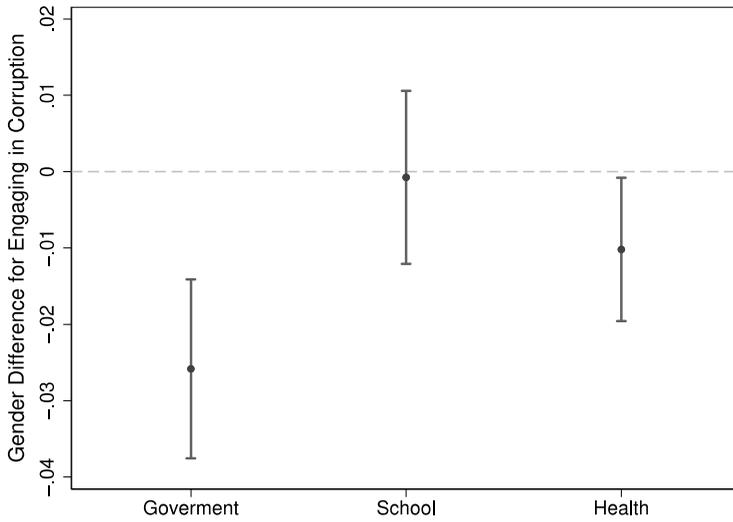
Figure 1. a: Predicted probabilities for government services (Model 1, Table 1). b: Predicted probabilities for education services (Model 5, Table 1). c: Predicted probabilities for health services (Model 9, Table 1).

Figure 2. Marginal effects for three different areas of bribery for round 6 (Model 1, 5, and 9 in Table 1).

consistent effects, varying between -2% and -2.5%, as seen in Models 2–4 in Table 1. For the Afrobarometer round 5 (Table 2 Model 1), there are again significant gender differences for general government services–point estimate −4.4% and confidence bound −5.7% to −3.2% in Model 1 of Table 2–which provides evidence in favour of hypothesis 1.[38] Similarly, the other multilevel models show consistent effects, varying between -3.8% and -4.3% as seen in Models 2–4 in Table 1. The conclusions drawn from the logit
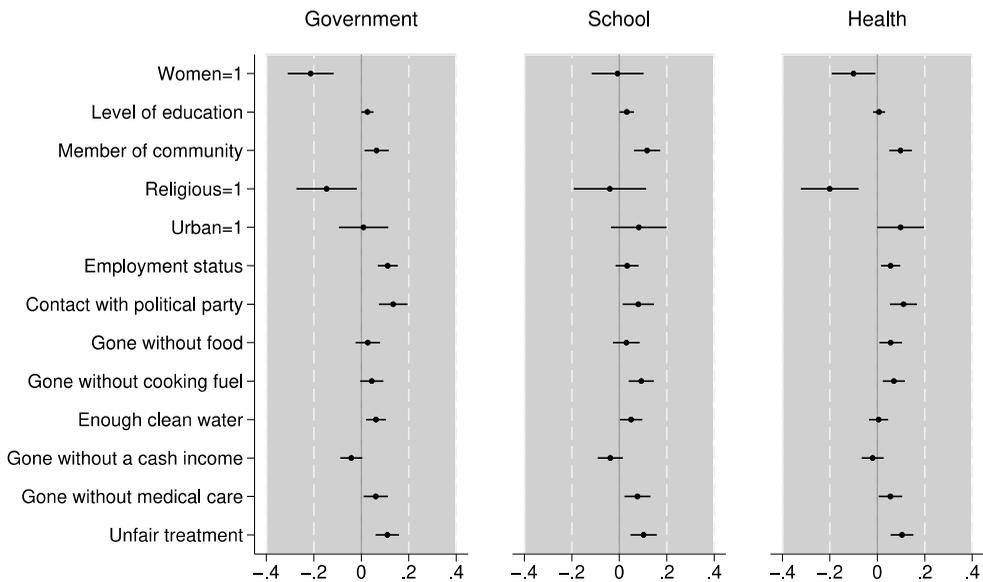
Figure 3. Confidence intervals for all coefficients round 6 (Table 1).

estimation with country dummies are consistent across different model specifications, including those incorporating country fixed effects (Model 2, Tables 1 and 2) and those that model gender equality (using GGGI and V-Dem) and corruption (using V-Dem) as separate country-level variables (Models 3 and 4, Tables 1 and 2).

There is consistent support for hypothesis 2a that women and men bribe equally for school services because the confidence interval for marginal effects includes the value 0 (Models 5–8 in Tables 1 and 2). Figure 1b shows overlapping predicted probabilities for men and women and the confidence interval in Figure 2 includes the zero line providing clear evidence that women and men engage equally in education-related corruption.

In contrast, the support for hypothesis 2b is mixed. Whereas there is consistent and robust support that men and women engage equally in bribery in the health sector for Afrobarometer round 5 (Table 2 Models 3), women are less likely to pay bribes than men in the health sector for Afrobarometer round 6 (Table 1 column 3). While the empirical results overall show more evidence in favour of hypothesis 2b rather than against, further investigation in the future is needed.

Regarding the country-level contextual control variables, whether accounted for through country dummies or explicitly modelled country-level variables on the higher order group level, gender equality – measured either through the GGGI (Models 3, 7, 11 in Tables 1 and 2) or V-Dem gender equality measure (Models 4, 8, 12 in Tables 1 and 2) – consistently shows a significant and increasing impact on individual-level bribery. This means, for instance, that the higher gender equality is in a countr, the higher the likelihood of an individual paying a bribe.[39] Similarly, national corruption, as measured by the V-Dem corruption indicators, also exerts a significant influence on bribery across all three domains of services: education, government, and healthcare (Models 3, 4, 7, 8, 11, 12 in Tables 1 and 2). These findings reinforce corruption's role as a key macro-level predictor. The presence of multiple significant country-level effects or country dummies suggests that national contexts play a crucial role in shaping individual-level bribery-related outcomes.

The Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) ranges between 0.11 and 0.37 in Tables 1 and 2, indicating that 11% to 37% of the variance of the individual-level dependent variable is explained by country-level contextual factors. In the analyses where the ICC exceeds 30%, country-level variables account for a substantial portion of the variation. Given the statistical significance of these variables, incorporating second-level modelling – either through fixed effects or explicitly measured national variables – shows to be essential. Notably, fixed effects country dummies tend to yield higher ICCs, further emphasizing the relevance of general national context in understanding individual-level bribery-related behaviours.

Critics might question whether the empirical results are artificial, and the empirical relationship is in fact spurious, caused by the varying frequency of interactions women have with general, health, or education services or varying frequency they are asked for bribes. Ultimately, cost–benefit assessment, structure or moral dilemma are alternative explanations that can explain the empirical findings. Explaining the reasons for engaging in bribery as well as the incidences of bribery is difficult as corruption is a complex interaction. Given that we cannot test the argument at a micro level with the available data, it is impossible to tell whether it is agency of women that determines the gender effect of bribery or whether it is the structure of how women engage with the administration that

essentially causes this effect.[40] Bribery is a complex interaction that cannot be explained by one argument alone. This paper provides a small, novel theoretical explanation and shows interesting empirical patterns that help us to better understanding how citizens engage in bribery.

Robustness of the results and discussion

The overall conclusions remain robust following the robustness definition of Sala-i-Martin (1997). When running country-wise jackknife analysis (excluding one country at a time). What becomes clear is that the significant effect for health care in Table 1 is dependent on the inclusion of country number 31 (Togo). When this country is excluded, the effect of gender on bribing for health services becomes insignificant (Tables A.6). For round 5, the effect is always insignificant for health services (Tables A.14 and A.15), as in the models presented in Table 2. For general government services, the effect is always significant for the country-wise jackknife test (Tables A.3, A.4, A.12 and A.13) and non-significant for school services (Tables A.7, A.8, A.16 and A.17). When gender interacts with, first, difficulty to access a government service (Tables A.10 and A.19), second, unfair treatment by the government based on the respondent's ethnicity (Tables A.11 and A.20), or third, empowerment of women in a country (Table A.21), the overall conclusion remains robust following Sala-i-Martin (1997), based on the sign of the coefficient. Women are less likely than men to pay a bribe for general government services when facing difficulties (Tables A.10 and A.19), experiencing unfair treatment (Tables A.11 and A.20), or in contexts related to women's empowerment (Table A.21). However, they are equally likely as men to pay a bribe for school or health services, where none of the coefficients is statistically significant (Tables A.10, A.11, A.19, A.20, and A.21).[41] Furthermore, I tested the robustness of the results for health and education bribery by not only controlling for women's empowerment at the national level but also by examining its interaction with two key national-level variables: gender equality (Tables A.22 and A.23, as well as Figures A.1–A.8).[42] The findings remain robust: Women are, on average, equally engaged in bribery as men for health and education services.

Conclusion

Do women engage less in corruption than men? It depends. Past empirical research largely finds women to engage less in corruption or bribery than men, or that countries with more women in parliament or the labour force to have lower levels of corruption (see Hao, Chang, and Sun 2018) but the full picture is far more nuanced. This manuscript contributes to the diverse academic debate regarding the relationship between gender and corruption by offering a small novel argument and extensive statistical testing.

   This paper argues that women have distinct interests in certain government services, influencing their likelihood of engaging in corruption compared to men. Since women are generally more risk-averse and assess the costs of corruption higher than men, they are less likely to engage in it overall. However, women value access to services like education and healthcare more highly, making them more willing to pay bribes for these services. In contrast, women see no greater benefit than men in general government services,

thereby maintaining gender differences in bribery likelihood. This explains why women are sometimes less and sometimes equally corrupt as men, depending on the service area.

My argument is based on an agency perspective regarding women's engagement in petty corruption for government services. The empirical results serve as a hoop test for my hypotheses, but they do not rule out other theoretical explanations. A structural argument posits that the conditions in which citizens live in shape their interactions and limit their choices. In my analysis, these structural conditions are captured by country fixed effects, which account for unobserved heterogeneity, such as variations in political power, economic conditions, and gender equality (Möhring 2012).

The country dummy variables reflect how government officials perceive women and how women may face more pressure to pay bribes compared to men. Thus, the fixed effects control for country variation, isolating differences among individuals. Other variables, such as gender, income, and education, are examined within these fixed effects. As some may view this approach as insufficient for addressing the underlying societal structures, I also included specific country variables into the statistical analysis: general corruption levels and gender equality measures into the analysis, with consistent conclusions. Explaining bribery is complex, and econometric specifications have their limits. The model reveals gender differences despite including country dummies and country-specific political and gender conditions, offering initial support for the agency argument. Future research should rigorously test the causal mechanisms of my argument and alternative explanations empirically when data becomes available or is specifically collected.

There are various insights to be gained for the gender and corruption debate, albeit with some limitations. First, the statistical models reveal that the gender-effect is sensitive to the good or service on offer. These findings should be retested to assess whether this pattern is specific to Africa at this time. Future research could explore interaction effects between gender equality, corruption, and bribe-paying across more diverse contexts where there is greater variation. A more comprehensive theoretical framework that incorporates these interactions could offer deeper insight into how gender influences corruption under different political and social conditions. Including individual-level data on corruption perceptions and access to education and healthcare could further clarify the mechanisms behind gendered bribery patterns. Such studies would improve generalizability and offer a more nuanced understanding of how gender and context shape corrupt behaviour.

Second, there are other areas of petty corruption where there may or may not exist a gender-specific difference corruption. Police force and water services are two areas where the Afrobarometer provides information.

Third, Esarey and Valdes (2023) suggested that different theoretical arguments on the relationship of gender and corruption may be context-dependent. Future research should identify why certain mechanisms dominate in one context but not in another. Based on these findings, it seems reasonable to propose that a conjoint experiment could help to further test the results of this study. Building on the argument that context matters, the author of this study suggests conducting conjoint experiments in different countries with varying levels of entrenched corruption. This approach aims to determine whether different areas of government services lead to varying effects of gender on bribery, with the impact potentially being stronger or weaker depending on the overall corruption context.

Notes

1. See, for instance, Esarey and Chirillo (2013), Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2018, 2019), Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti (2001), Holmgren (2015), Rivas (2013), Stensöta, Wängnerud, and Svensson (2015), and Watson and Moreland (2014).
2. Hao, Chang, and Sun 2018 provide an excellent overview of the literature on gender and corruption.
3. General government services are when a citizen attempts 'to get an identity document like a birth certificate, driver's license, passport or voter's card, or a permit, from government?' Afrobarometer Round 6: Q55E.
4. My argument extends the impact of gender-interest differences (e.g. Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019) to bribe-payers involved in everyday petty corruption, not just to bribe-takers, grand corruption, or government service quality.
5. Using survey data to learn about corruption is not unusual (see Peiffer and Rose (2018) or Justesen and Bjørnskov (2014)) but still rare.
6. I refer to the social or cultural gender difference between males and females and not the biological difference between the human sexes (following Chao 1999).
7. Women in public office are not always held to a higher standard than men but punished more by female voters (Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018).
8. Recently, research has shifted from studying women's impact on corruption to exploring why women are perceived as less corrupt. Malmberg and Saikkonen (2024) offer key insights with a cross-country analysis using World Value Survey data.
9. The network effect has recently been called into question. For instance, Pereira and Fernandez-Vazquez (2023) find that introducing quotas for women in Spain has a long-term effect on reducing the country's corruption level, extending beyond the initial implementation phase.
10. The network effect has recently been called into question. For instance, Pereira and Fernandez-Vazquez (2023) find that introducing quotas for women in Spain has a long-term effect on reducing the country's corruption level, extending beyond the initial implementation phase.
11. Examining newly elected female mayors in Spain, Bauhr and Charron (2021) find that the initial reduction in corruption levels attributed to female mayors diminishes over time.
12. Women representation and corruption might determine each other both ways (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2019).
13. Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud (2019) argue that improved public services reduce women's need to pay bribes. In contrast, my research focuses on the bribe-payer's perspective, regardless of service quality. This shift highlights how societal norms and individual motivations shape bribery decisions. When service needs are high, gender-based differences in norms or risk tolerance may diminish, offering a more nuanced view of bribery behaviour.
14. Previous work focusing on bribe-takers: Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti (2001), Esarey and Chirillo (2013), Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2018, 2019), Goetz (2007), Holmgren (2015), Rivas (2013), Stensöta, Wängnerud, and Svensson (2015), Swamy et al. (2001), and Watson and Moreland (2014).
15. Previous work focusing on briber-payers: Alatas et al. 2009; Fišar et al. 2016; Rivas 2013; Swamy et al. 2001.
16. This assumption is widely accepted in corruption research and has been employed by scholars such as Barnes and Beaulieu (2019), Esarey and Chirillo (2013), Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2018), Lee and Guven (2013), and Watson and Moreland (2014). Although the Afrobarometer dataset lacks variables to directly test for risk-aversion, it's worth noting that the authors also do not explicitly test this assumption in their work. Future research could address this limitation.
17. Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Chaudhuri et al. 2024 (gender gap in risk-aversion disappears with longer time in office); Esarey and Chirillo 2013; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018; Lee and Guven 2013; Watson and Moreland 2014.
18. Retrieved 31/03/2022 https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/ghana

19. Health care and education are regularly used as examples in other gender and corruption work (see for instance Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019 or Peiffer and Rose 2018). Scholars usually find stronger support for the gender effect for health care spending in parliament more than for education spending (see Clayton et al. 2019 or Mechkova and Carlitz 2021).

20. Guerra and Zhuravleva (2022) found increasing benefits increase the likelihood of women to engage in bribery.

21. Alexander and Bågenholm (2018) call for moving beyond macro-level analyses to explore how female leaders actively engage in and combat corruption differently than men.

22. Detail on sample in Table A.27. The data set includes 465 regions.

23. See online appendix on why Africa is a good region to study.

24. Question Q61E, Q61C, and Q61A, full sample, round 5

25. Out of the total sample, 266 observations (0.5%) fall into the 'don't know' category. Given the small size of this subset across multiple countries, it is not feasible to test for gender differences reliably. Similar low frequencies are observed in the other 'don't know' categories, with 0.4% for healthcare services and 0.5% for school services. The same holds for round 6 (government service 0.3% school service 0.5%, for health care services 0.3%).

26. Paying a bribe is a two-step process: citizen need to have contact with a government official and then decide whether to pay a bribe or not (Peiffer and Rose 2018).

27. Although the data is a few years old, the consistent patterns across rounds 5 and 6 suggest stability over time. Still, as with any analysis, findings should not be overgeneralized beyond the studied context.

28. Turning the variable into a dummy tests only whether someone engages in corruption or not. While frequent and infrequent engagement may differ in motivation, the hypothesis focuses on any engagement, so the dummy is appropriate for testing it.

29. Breakdown of the answer categories: 0 = never 19,688 observations, 1 = once or twice 1,844 observations, 2 = few times 911 observations, 3 = often 624 observations.

30. This variable captures potential interactions respondents may have had beyond their encounters with government officials, during which they may or may not have paid a bribe.

31. I include a few variables that capture different forms of poverty (compare Retrieved 4/4/2022: https://blogs.worldbank.org/developmenttalk/why-world-bank-adding-new-ways-measure-poverty).

32. The variables of global gender gap index included are for *general government services* 'The Global Gender Gap Index (0 to 1, where 1 indicates no gap) examines the gap between men and women in four fundamental categories (subindexes): Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment' (Teorell et al. 2024, 1315); for *educational attainment* 'subindex captures the gap be- tween women's and men's current access to education through ratios of women to men in primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level education' (Teorell et al. 2024, 1314); for *gender health gap* is a combination of two components: 'The first is the sex ratio at birth, which aims specifically to capture the phenomenon of missing women, prevalent in many countries with a strong son preference. Second, we use the gap between women's and men's healthy life expectancy. This measure provides an estimate of the number of years that women and men can expect to live in good health by taking into account the years lost to violence, disease, malnutrition and other relevant factors' (Teorell et al. 2024, 1316).

33. Exploring interaction effects between individual gender and national context could offer interesting insights, but would require a different theoretical approach and broader geographic scope. Given limited variation in Africa, such modelling would yield context-specific findings with little generalizability. This paper maintains its current focus, with suggestions for future research outlined in the conclusion.

34. VDem women political empowerment index (vdem_gender) 'Women's political empowerment is defined as a process of increasing capacity for women, leading to greater choice, agency, and participation in societal decision-making' (Teorell et al. 2024, 1410). Political corruption index vdem_corr 'How pervasive is political corruption?' (Teorell et al. 2024, 1398)

35. Country fixed effects included as i.country.
36. Specifies a random intercept model, meaning country-level variation is captured as a random effect, not as a set of fixed dummies. I use the random effects (|| country:) function of Stata that assumes country-specific effects are drawn from a distribution.
37. Tables created using Esttab (Jann and Long 2010).
38. Overall, my effect sizes are comparable with studies such as Lee and Guven (2013) who found gender effect between zero and three percent and Peiffer and Rose (2018) between one and five percent.
39. The country-level effect of gender equality is somewhat surprising and warrants further investigation. As I was asked to speculate, I shall. One speculative interpretation is that in more gender-equal societies, social norms around power and negotiation may shift in ways that make informal exchanges – such as bribery – more normalized or strategically employed, particularly in competitive or resource-constrained environments.
40. For structure versus agency see for instance Elder-Vass (2010).
41. To avoid confusion: due to the lack of better alternatives, the gender equality variable used here is: 'How well or badly would you say the current government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Empowering women?' q65p This variable reflects perceptions of the government's efforts to promote gender equality, rather than respondents' assessments of the actual state of gender equality in the country.
42. As before, the country level contextual variable gender equality and corruption level increase levels of bribery.

Ethical approval

This research utilizes secondary data from a publicly available dataset provided by Afrobarometer and the University of Gothenburg. No additional data was collected, and no interviews were conducted.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data availability statement

Replication materials (stata do-file for main tables and figures) available from author's university website. Data set available from Afrobarometer website.
   ChatGPT was used in part for proofreading in August 2024, March 2025, and May 2025.

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