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Women's political representation, good governance and human development

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Abstract

As women's political inclusion has become the international norm, many countries have implemented gender quotas or actively tried to increase women's political representation. Women's inclusion is also expected to bring positive development outcomes, as women, both as voters and politicians, may prioritize policies conducive to development. Yet, previous research has shown that descriptive representation does not automatically improve governance, and that various contextual factors influence (female) politicians' ability to shape policy outcomes. In this article, we examine how political corruption affects the dynamics of women's representation. We argue that while the presence of women in politics has the potential to increase development, it can also be used as "window-dressing" to legitimize rule where in reality male patrons continue to dominate policy decisions. Thus, women representatives recruited from the same corrupt networks as these male patrons may be used to perpetuate the status-quo or even decrease development outcomes. Building on previous research, we argue that patriarchal gender norms and relatively weaker standing of women in corrupt environments can explain why women in these societies may support policy decisions that go against their preferences and

interests as a group. We conduct a quantitative analysis drawing on time-series cross-sectional data on 182 countries from 1900 to 2014 to shed light on the linkage between women empowerment, corruption, and development. We find that women's representation only promotes human development if corruption is at low levels, while under high level of corruption women's inclusion is associated with *worsened* development outcomes. This finding suggests that women political empowerment might not always be a silver bullet to increasing substantive representation, and especially not under very poor levels of governance and prevalent corruption.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Women's political inclusion has strong normative value but has also been accompanied by the expectation that it should improve governance outputs. Emerging evidence shows that women's empowerment is associated with improved policy representation of women's interests (Clayton, Josefsson, et al., 2019), faster economic growth (Duflo, 2012), and better health-care outcomes (Swiss et al., 2012). At the same time, numerous studies also show that corruption in the form of clientelism, misprocurement and general abuse of power, can undermine institutional efforts to improve governance (Holmberg & Rothstein, 2011).

In this paper we connect these two lines of research, arguing that we need to further examine how the institutional environment—in particular the quality of governance-interacts with the presence of women in politics. We develop and test a theory that women political empowerment (WPE) should lead to improved governance, but only when corruption rates are low. This would give the opportunity for women politicians to act as agents of change and focus resources on development. This assumption is backed by existing research showing that female politicians and voters tend to prioritize policies conducive for development (Phillips, 1995). By contrast, in contexts with rampant corruption, increasing women's political participation might have *negative* effects on the same development outcomes that female empowerment is supposed to improve (Nistotskaya & Stensöta, 2018).

Thus, while women's representation has the potential to transform politics, it can also be used as "window-dressing" to appease female voters or look progressive to the international community (Nistotskaya & Stensöta, 2018; Valdini, 2019) while male elites continue to dominate politics. Female representatives can thus be recruited from the same corrupt networks and via corrupt means (Bjarnegård et al., 2018) or be recruited when their presence is advantageous to the career of male politicians (Valdini, 2019). Hence, women's presence can contribute to perpetuating the status-quo or even decrease the resources devoted to development outcomes. We reason that patriarchal gender norms and the relatively weaker standing of women in corrupt environments could explain why women are more likely than men to make policy decisions that go directly against their preferences as a group (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2020). Finally, the presence of women

in decision-making institutions can also be used to legitimize policies that deteriorate the situation for women in particular, and thus, for development more generally (Clayton et al., 2019).

Studying the period between 1900 until 2014 globally, we find evidence of a strong and robust negative link between women's political empowerment and infant mortality at low levels of corruption. However, women's representation is associated with *worsened* development outcomes when corruption is rampant. We show that the negative effects on development could be at least partially driven by countries who have implemented institutional efforts to increase women's representation such as quotas. At the same time, reducing corruption is associated with subsequent improved mortality rates, but only when men do not hold a *total* dominance of political power. The results are robust to different model specifications, including important covariates such as economic development, democracy, and education levels as well as to the inclusion of country and year fixed effects.

The paper contributes to the literature on how descriptive representation affects concrete policy outcomes. While there is rich evidence on the differences in policy priorities between men and women as voters and politicians (Clayton, Josefsson, et al., 2019), as well as about the effects of women's representation on policy outputs such as bills or budgets (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018), relatively less is known about how women's presence in politics affects policy *outcomes*. Existing literature finds conflicting evidence, as empirical findings depend on the institutions and geographical context in focus (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Nistotskaya & Stensöta, 2018; Swiss et al., 2012). Such conflicting evidence calls for understanding better the conditions under which descriptive representation is conducive to development. Addressing this gap, our paper contributes to this field of research by focusing our attention on corruption as a stumbling block for examining the effects of identity politics in practice.

2 | THEORY

2.1 | Women's political representation and development

The common expectation that women's representation[1] is conducive to development assumes that men and women have different policy preferences (Funk & Gathmann, 2015; Phillips, 1995). Scholars argue that gendered preferences are a result of socialization, shaped by different life experiences rather than inherent biological differences (Beckwith, 2014; Sapiro, 1981). As a result of social patriarchal norms, historically men have tended to dominate the public space (e.g., politics and economics), while the private sphere (e.g., taking care of the home and the family) has been reserved for women (Krook, 2017). Thus, women have historically been more directly concerned with issues of health and nutrition (Bhalotra & Clots-Figueras, 2014; Duflo, 2012). These experiences are manifested in politics. Survey evidence from various contexts shows a significant gender difference in political preferences, where women tend to show stronger support for social policies related to child-care, family, and women's rights than men (Clayton, Josefsson, et al., 2019; Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Wängnerud, 2000).

These policy preferences have concrete implications for policy outputs when women enter office. Women legislators advance issues prioritized by women as a group by changing the bills dealt with in the legislature (Saint-Germain, 1989); by building issue-networks in parliament, civil society, and across the different branches of government (Piscopo, 2014); securing leadership positions and committee assignments that allow them to advance or block legislation (Berkman & O'connor, 1993). As an example of concrete policy success, the comparative global analysis by

Clayton and Zetterberg (2018) finds that the introduction of gender quotas led increased spending for healthcare at the expense of defense.

The specific policy preferences and legislative efforts of female politicians should be also reflected in concrete policy outcomes. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) utilize the random assignment of quotas for women across villages in India and causally identify that leaders invest more in infrastructure directly relevant to their own gender. Also studying India, Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras (2014) find that women's political representation in state legislatures improves public provision of antenatal and childhood health services in the legislators' electoral district. In an analysis of 102 developing countries from 1980 to 2005, Swiss et al. (2012) find evidence that countries with over 20% share of women in parliament experience increased rates of immunizations for various diseases, as well as infant and child survival. Mechkova and Carlitz (2021) develop the proposition that female politicians are more likely to work for the implementation of policy issues, prioritized by women, at the same time as female voters are more likely to hold them accountable if politicians do not act in this way. In sub-Saharan Africa they find that greater descriptive representation of women is associated with lower infant and child mortality rates, and higher health budgets. Evidence from the United States points in a similar direction. The introduction of female voting rights in the early 20th century led to a sharp increase in health expenditure (about 35% within a year) and a drop of 8%–15% in child mortality (Miller, 2008). This is due to the qualitatively different issues women emphasize in the political agenda, and the mobilization of resources for improved healthcare.

However, these findings are not universal. Studies from Latin America show no correlation between increasing the descriptive representation of politically marginalized groups in the legislature, including women, and subsequent bills aimed at protecting the rights of those groups (Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Htun et al., 2013). The explanation for this null result put forward by Htun et al. (2013) is that even if minorities are formally present, the institutions continue to be dominated by the same elites, built over clientelist networks, thus, leaving little room for change coming from newly represented groups.

Within this backdrop, the paper examines the conditions under which women's political representation can change policy outcomes, and in particular, health-care, which is expected to be higher on the priority list of women. To understand better how the institutional environment can affect policy representation, we now turn to the literature that examines the effects of quality of governance.

2.2 | Corruption and development

An extensive literature on the importance of good governance pays particular attention to its impact on various aspects of social well-being, including indicators such as poverty and economic inequality (Lewis, 2006; Rothstein, 2011; Sacks & Margaret Levi, 2010).

Bad governance refers to practices of corruption, including bribes, favoritism, patronage, misprocurement and abuse of power, all of which weaken the mechanisms through which governments have greater incentives to respond to citizens demands for better social conditions (Diamond, 2007). Due to misconduct, well-intentioned measures to improve development outcomes such as increased budgets for example, do not have a meaningful impact (Klomp & De Haan, 2008).

Holmberg and Rothstein (2011) summarize the proposed causal pathways for direct and indirect effects through which governance can affect development outcomes. Indirectly, better

governance is positively associated with economic performance and improved social capital (Rose-Ackerman, 1998), which results in improved access to food, housing, clean water, and sanitation. Quality of government is also related to higher levels of trust in institutions, which in turn is expected to increase people's willingness to pay higher taxes and boost the confidence that government agencies will spend taxpayers' money well. These revenues can then be used to fund various social policies. Directly, Holmberg and Rothstein (2011) argue that the main problem in providing people with services such as access to safe water or medicine is not a lack of technical solutions but instead dysfunctional institutions.

Examining 120 countries Holmberg and Rothstein (2011) find a strong correlation between measures of quality of governance, such as rule of law, control of corruption, and government effectiveness, on one hand, and several standard measures of population health, on the other, including higher life expectancy at birth, reduced infant and maternal mortality, as well as higher levels of subjective health feelings. Further, focusing on the conditions of this relationship, Klomp and De Haan (2008) analyze the role of governance by employing six indicators of governance in improving a set of 18 health outcomes using a cross-sectional analysis for 101 countries. In addition to the standard indicators of health such as mortality, they also study indicators that lead to mortality reduction such as the number of healthcare personnel and immunization rates. They find that governance influences health via its positive impact on income and the quality of the health care sector.

Summarizing, there is well-document effect of corruption on the success of reforms aiming to improve development outcomes. Therefore, scholars who wish to understand how other factors (in this case women's representation) affect development, need to also consider the interaction with corruption. We observe that while in the gender and politics literature there is abundant evidence of a direct correlation between women's representation and corruption, less is known about how women's representation interacts with corruption in affecting development outcomes.

3 | THE REPRESENTATION-CORRUPTION-DEVELOPMENT NEXUS

We argue that a higher share of women in politics does not automatically lead to improved policy outcomes, which instead are hindered or accelerated by other conditions. As women political representation becomes the international norm (Towns, 2010), many countries have actively tried to increase women's political participation (Krook, 2010). Yet, in many cases women's empowerment does not translate into policy change benefiting women in general, but, on the contrary, they serve to reinforce the status quo or to advance the interests of narrow segments of the elite. We argue that the overall quality of institutions themselves is one important conditioning variable, which shapes women's ability to influence policy outcomes. Women political representation will only enhance human development under low levels of corruption, while harming human development under high levels of corruption. Our argument is summarized in Figure 1.

The argument that women's representation is associated with improved development outcomes is well-grounded in existing research (Bruce et al., 2022; Miller, 2008; Swiss et al., 2012). Summarizing the results from edited volume on corruption and gender, Stensöta and Wängnerud (2018) conclude that women are able to make a difference in terms of governance in contexts where there is "room for maneuver" (p. 4). Indeed, the evidence from previous research points to women representatives gathering more resources and paying more attention to health as policy compared to their male counterparts, which leads to a significant correlation between higher representation of women in politics and reduced mortality rates (Mechkova & Carlitz, 2021).

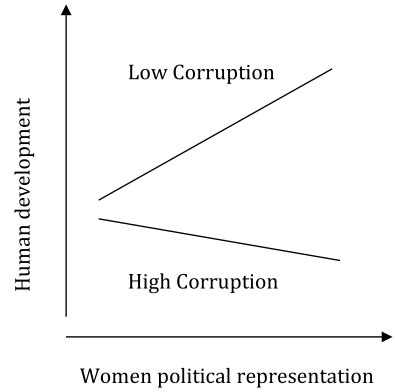


FIGURE 1 Expected relationship between women political representation, corruption and development.

It is perhaps less intuitive why there would be a negative relationship between women empowerment and development when corruption levels are high, as illustrated by the bottom line in Figure 1. Our argument builds primarily on existing studies showing that women's presence could be used as "window-dressing" (Donno & Kreft, 2018; Nistotskaya & Stensöta, 2018; Valdini, 2019), when in fact male patrons continue to dominate policy decisions, as women representatives are recruited from corrupt networks (Bjarnegård et al., 2018; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). We now elaborate further on this argument.

Contentious claims have been made in relation to the outcomes of increasing women's political representation. "Artificially" increasing women's representation via the implementation of gender quotas may produce second-class politicians that do not have the ability to do the job (see Zetterberg, 2008 for discussion). In a study of the implementation of gender quotas in Argentina, a democratic but corrupt country, Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) show that women's descriptive representation did not increase substantive representation. Instead, as party leaders met the quota requirements using nepotism to appoint candidate from family networks, elected female representatives consulted party leaders about legislative voting which reduced women's political power.

To break corruption networks, Bjarnegård et al. (2018) argue, quota candidates should be recruited from new networks, for example, civil society organizations or professional organizations, in order for those candidates to have the freedom to act according to their own priorities. Instead, if quotas bring in candidates from existing networks, they would be more likely to simply reproduce existing patterns, as they would still answer to the political party patrons that helped them to come to power.

Similarly, Nistotskaya and Stensöta (2018) examine the effects of women's representation in Russia—a context of electoral authoritarianism[2] and high levels of corruption—on infant mortality rates. They argue that increasing women representation is an attempt made by the regime to emulate representation and accountability. But in practice, women are recruited through nepotism, and are being tightly controlled. Thus, women representation does not represent real progress for the causes of women's interests. A case in point is the decriminalization of domestic violence. In 2017 the Russian parliament, comprising of 16% women, voted 380-3 to remove criminal liability unless "substantial bodily harm" is caused, and importantly, the bill was pushed forward by women.[3]

An explanation for this phenomenon is that women who have advanced in their careers through the existing system depend on the status quo and might be unwilling to change it. That

could be because of their accountability to patrons as argued above, or women coming from the elite might have different views as they might be disconnected from other sections of society that rely most strongly on public service delivery. In this scenario, women are no longer the traditional care-takers, who want to work towards alleviating that burden. Research from India shows that women legislators typically come from the upper-castes, and their social position drives their unwillingness to support policies aimed at addressing development issues (Clots-Figueras, 2011).

Further, previous research shows that women in politics are more likely to follow party discipline than men for two main reasons (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2020). First, political parties are more likely to advance "disciplined women," while the same constraints are not necessarily present for men. This argument builds on the work of Siavelis (2012) showing that parliamentarians are less dependent on political parties in cases when they came to power through clientelist networks, since those politicians bring in important resources in the form of voters or finances. Importantly, men are those who manage to summon such resources more than women thanks to their long-lasting clientelist relationships (Arriola & Johnson, 2014).[4] This leaves women in more a vulnerable position, where they have less leverage to advance their own priorities, as they rely on a good relationship with the party leaders to keep their position.

Secondly, Clayton and Zetterberg (2020) highlight that gender norms make women less likely to rebel against the official party policy. That comes from the history of gender-norm stereotypes, where being aggressive and agentic are traits that are favored in men, while women should be kind and compassionate (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). Instead of being "disruptive," women are expected to follow the political lines drawn by the largely male elite (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2020). In their analysis of 17 African parliaments and over 800 legislators, Clayton and Zetterberg (2020) show empirically the connection that women who follow party discipline are less likely to support women's rights reform—which often challenge patriarchal authorities. We expect this connection to be particularly strong when the first condition—high levels of clientelism, is also to present, meaning that the patron-client relationship between women parliamentarians and political party leaders will substitute the accountability link with voters that should motivate women to defend other women's interests.

Finally, those who hold the de-facto power might be encouraged to implement policies that go directly against women's interest such as de-funding healthcare, when women are present in decision-making bodies. Experimental research from the U.S. shows that the mere presence of women when decisions are made, can legitimize shrinking women's rights as a group (Clayton, O'Brien and Piscopo, 2019). Thus, being present in decision-making bodies might serve as an instrument to legitimize otherwise harmful decisions.

4 | EMPIRICAL STRATEGY

To investigate how women's political empowerment is related to governance and human development, we conduct a quantitative analysis using linear regression on time-series cross-sectional data. To measure women's empowerment and corruption we draw on indicators from V-Dem (Coppedge et al., 2021b). This dataset has several advantages pertaining to studying this question. First, by covering most countries from 1900 to 2020, it offers longer time-series than previous datasets. Second, because V-Dem offers fine-grained measures on various aspects of democracy it enables us to capture women's political empowerment as well as levels of corruption (Coppedge et al., 2021a). Finally, the data set is carefully constructed to ensure a high degree of reliability and validity; the data generating process and aggregation scheme is fully transparent, and can be cross-examined (Pemstein et al., 2018). The raw data comes from more than 3200 experts in total.

4.1 | Dependent variable: Human development

Consistent with previous research on the effects of democracy and governance on human development (Gerring et al., 2012), we utilize data on *infant mortality rates* as main proxy for human development. It measures the number of deaths prior to age 1 per 1000 live births per year. The base variable is drawn from Gapminder—which compiles data from various sources such as Unicef (2020) and Mitchell (1998), with additional data imputed from Clio-Infra. The resulting measure covers 1900–2014. The measure is transformed by the natural logarithm, as the distribution of this variable is right-skewed and there is a general downward trend in mortality in recent decades.

4.2 | Independent variable: Women's political representation

We use V-Dem's WPE index, which consists of two measures: share of women in parliament, and the expert-coded indicator "Power distributed by gender" (Sundström et al., 2017). The latter indicator captures the perceptions of coders about women's empowerment beyond the legislature. We argue that it is important to consider the influence of women across different institutions to capture their full capacity to influence politics. As robustness check, we estimate the main models and figures with the share of women in parliament.

4.3 | Interaction term: Political corruption

We measure corruption using V-Dem's Political Corruption Index. This index includes measures of six distinct types of corruption that cover both, different areas and levels of the polity realm, distinguishing between executive, legislative, judicial and public sector corruption (Coppedge et al., 2021a). The measures tap into several distinguished types of corruption: both "petty" and "grand"; both bribery and theft; both corruption aimed and influencing law making and affecting its implementation. We use the V-Dem measure of corruption instead of alternative estimates for three main reasons: First, for its superior temporal and geographic coverage.[5] Second, the V-Dem measure captures various aspects of corruption, all important for reducing infant mortality and answering the research question at hand. Third, the data is extensively validated, and avoids common problems of competing datasets such as changing aggregation rules over time, or the use of several data sources, which multiplies measurement errors (for comparison with alternative measures and validation, see McMann et al., 2021). On this measure, low values correspond to widespread corruption, whereas high values signify that corruption is not as extensive. To ease the interpretation of our results, we refer to this index as the "No-Corruption" Index.

4.4 | Model specification and control variables

To interrogate the relationship of interest we use ordinary least square estimator on the panel data we put together. In all models we cluster the errors by country to address concerns with heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation. In addition, we also estimate models with 5-year panels to account for autocorrelation. The implementation chain of specific policies is quite long, and substantial amount of time could pass before intended reforms of politicians take form in practice. That is why we test models with 1- and 5-year lags of the dependent variable.

A standard practice in panel data analysis is to use country-fixed effects to account for stable country-level characteristics that might explain both the dependent and independent variable. These can be for example, culture or geography. Thus, we apply country-fixed effects and note that this type of model explores within-country variation (meaning we avoid comparing Sweden to Saudi Arabia, which are different cases for a variety of reasons). We further include year-fixed effects because certain historical events (e.g., world wars) might confound the relationship of interest. The two-way fixed effects model is relatively inefficient, as it wipes out a lot of the variation, increasing chances of a false negative result. However, the model produces largely unbiased estimates, which is why we keep it as our benchmark (Plümper et al., 2005).

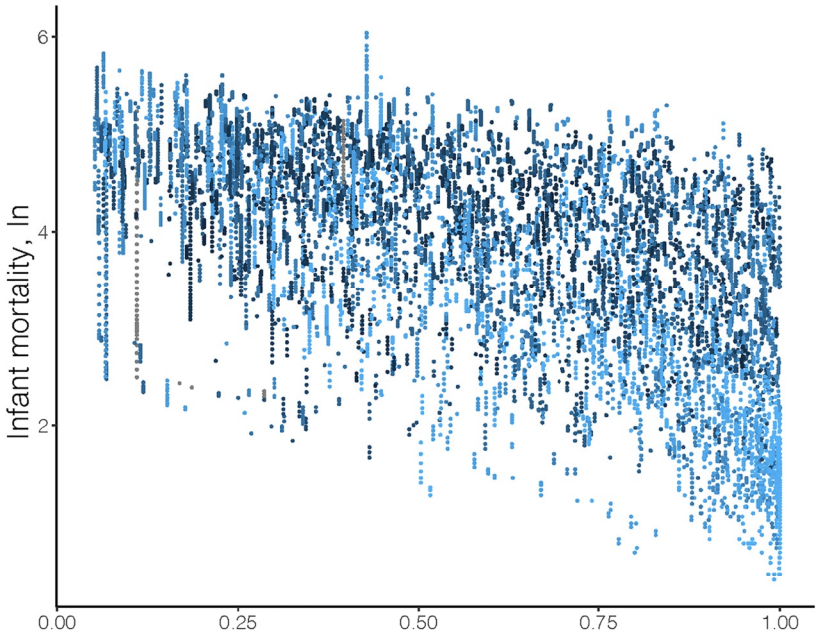
Additionally, our models account for other likely confounders while we also attempt to keep the models parsimonious to avoid list-wise deletion and post-treatment bias. GDP per capita and urbanization[6] (the ratio of urban population to total population) are two socio-economic indicators that capture general levels of development, while they also serve as good proxies for concepts such as state capacity (both accessed through the V-Dem dataset and based on data from the Maddison Project and Clio-Infra, respectively). To account for the political context which might affect the relationship of interest, we include an index of how free and fair elections are in our main specifications. The measure is extracted from the V-Dem dataset and captures intentional irregularities. We decide to use this narrow measure of democracy to avoid conceptual overlap between more comprehensive measures such as for example, the widely used V-Dem polyarchy index, and our main independent variables of interest. However, as a robustness test, we also control for "democratic stock" (Gerring et al., 2012), operationalized as a country's experience with democracy. Finally, we also include as potential confounder the average years of education among citizens older than 15 (Clio-Infra). Further, we test an alternative specification of our models with a variable that captures whether gender quotas exist. We re-code V-Dem's[7] 5-level variable v2lgqugen, where 0 corresponds to no quotas, 1 captures cases where quotas exist but there are either no sanctions or very week sanctions in case of non-implementation, and finally, 2 corresponds to countries which enforce strong sanctions or have reserved seats for women.

Finally, we include as a robustness check models which add in the *y*-axis the average score of the dependent variable for the neighbors of each country. This additional test serves as a control for region-specific developments such as vaccine rollout efficiency, which varies greatly by region.[8]

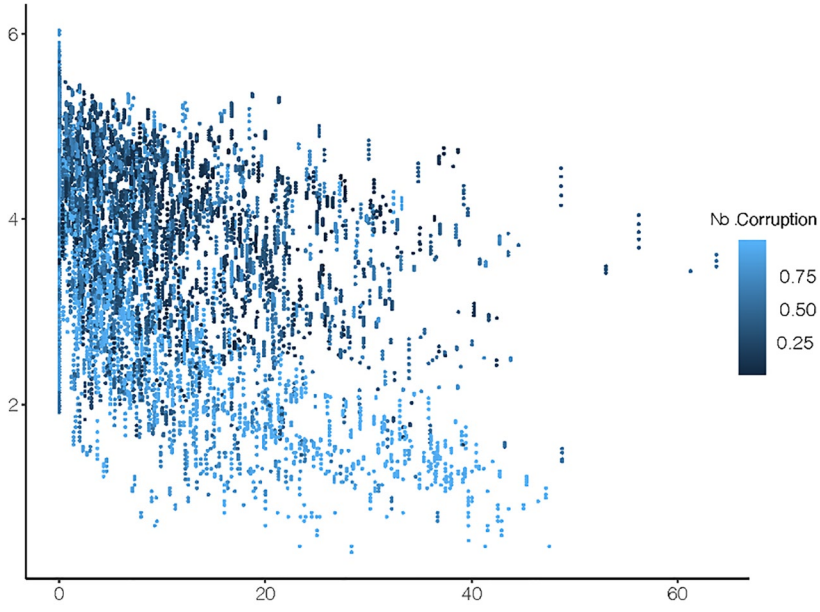
5 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We start by presenting descriptive results. Figure 2a illustrates the interaction between Women's Political Empowerment Index (*x*-axis) and the No-Corruption Index with dependent variable infant mortality (*y*-axis), while graph 2b shows the same relationship with the share of women in parliament as explanatory variable. The colors of the dots signify the levels of no-corruption in a country. Darker colors correspond to more instances of corruption, while lighter blue dots depict countries with lower levels of corruption.

The patterns in the scatterplot suggest that there is overall a negative relationship between mortality rates and inclusion of women: Country-years with a high level of women's political empowerment on average also tend to have lower levels of mortality. Yet, when inspecting the data, we see that the relationship varies depending on the levels of corruption. The negative relationship is stronger for the dots with lighter color (lower levels of corruption), while the country-years colored with darker blue tend to have higher mortality rates independently of



(a) Women Political Empowerment Index



(b) Share of Women in Parliament

FIGURE 2 Scatterplot. Interaction between the No-Corruption Index and two measures of women empowerment. DV, Infant mortality, log.

women empowerment levels. These descriptive patterns give us confidence that the hypothesized relationship about interaction effects between women political participation and corruption is plausible, and we continue to investigate it with more rigorous statistical analysis.

5.1 | Main analysis

In Table 1 we test our main hypothesis, indicating that the effect of women's empowerment on development depends on the level of corruption. Here, we estimate the following specification:

$$\mathrm{IM}_{i,t+1} = \beta W_{i,t} + \beta C_{i,t} + \beta W_{i,t} * C_{i,t} + X_{t,i} + \zeta_i + \theta_t + \epsilon_{i,t},$$

in which $\mathrm{IM}_{i,t+1}$ is infant mortality rate in year $t + 1$ in country i, W is women's empowerment in country i and year t and C is level of corruption in country i in year t. We include a vector of covariates ($X_{i,t}$), country fixed effects (ζ_i) and year fixed effects (θ_t).

TABLE 1 Interaction effect between the women's political empowerment index and the no-corruption index on infant mortality rates $t + 1$

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Dependent variable: Infant mortality (log) $t + 1$					
WPE	−1.255***	0.752**	0.678***			
	(−6.78)	(3.30)	(3.73)			
No-corruption	1.622***	0.148	0.173	0.851*	−0.326+	−0.337+
	(6.10)	(0.80)	(0.80)	(2.46)	(−1.86)	(−1.96)
WPE × no-corruption	−2.496***	−1.088***	−1.103***			
	(−8.22)	(−3.46)	(−3.86)			
Women legislators				−0.0306***	0.0148*	0.0109*
				(−4.42)	(2.18)	(2.57)
Women legislators × no-corruption				−0.0556***	−0.0200*	−0.0174**
				(−6.06)	(−2.16)	(−2.86)
Clean elections index		−0.0921	−0.109		−0.0995	−0.0891
		(−1.44)	(−1.46)		(−1.05)	(−0.80)
GDP per capita, log		−0.419***	−0.306***		−0.478***	−0.350***
		(−5.93)	(−5.76)		(−6.39)	(−6.21)
Urbanization		0.420			0.542+	
		(1.38)			(1.69)	
Education 15+			−0.107**			−0.0959*
			(−2.75)			(−2.41)
R-squared	0.657	0.911	0.929	0.508	0.917	0.928
N	10,812	7073	8640	9556	6112	7761
Country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year FE		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes

Note: The signs used in the table correspond to the level of likelihood that the identified relationship is due to chance: +$p < .10$; *$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$. All models are estimated using linear regression (Ordinary Least Squares). Standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. Constant, country and year dummies are omitted from the table.

We analyze first the interaction effect between the No-Corruption index and the overall index of WPE (first three models), and after that we replicate the same models with the share of women legislators as main explanatory variable. Note that in the No-Corruption Index a high score equals a low level of corruption. The initial models (1 and 4) examine the interaction effects without control variables. Models 2 and 5 introduce the full model specification with year-fixed effects to account for time-trends, and control variables for general level of economic development and infrastructure by including GDP per capita (logged) and urbanization, and the level of democracy. Models 3 and 6 also add education as control variable, but we drop urbanization due to list-wise deletion and the substantive number of cases we lose in that specification (more than 1500). As a robustness check, we re-estimate the results with filled in missing values for the variable urbanization, where we replaced the missing data points with the last available data. Table A6, model 2, in the Appendix presents the results controlling simultaneously for education and urbanization, and the main results remain substantively the same.

The results show that, across all models, the interaction terms between women's political empowerment and the No-Corruption Index are statistically significant with a negative sign, including in the strict models with country and time fixed effects, and when accounting for important covariates such as democracy and economic development. This finding suggests that the effect of each of the variables on infant mortality varies with different values of the other variable. The individual coefficients for WPE index, share of women in parliament and No-Corruption are not as easy to interpret, given that they are continuous variables.

Both for the WPE index and share of women in parliament the coefficients are consistently statistically significant but flip sign when we introduce the control variables and year-fixed effects. The *positive* sign for both measures in the full models suggests that when corruption is rampant, the increases in women's presence in politics is associated with *worsened* development outcomes. This finding is consistent with our theory that in high-corruption settings, due to clientelist ties women will be held accountable to corrupt elites instead to voters, and might be used to work in the interest of a small group instead of the common good. Women are more likely to be dependent on clientelist ties and less likely to rebel against official government policies due to their relatively weaker position than men in corrupt environments.

The coefficient for the No-Corruption index is positive, although not statistically significant at conventional levels when considering the WPE index in the full models. When considering the interaction with women legislators, the coefficient for the No-Corruption index becomes negative and statistically significant at the 0.1 level when adding year dummies and controls in models 5 and 6. These results suggest that corruption has an independent negative effect of decreasing infant mortality.

To help with the interpretation of the interaction terms, we present figures showing graphically the relationship of interest. Figure 3 depicts the coefficients from the full models with control variables (Model 3) between No-Corruption and the WPE indices. The left-hand side of the figure shows the coefficient estimates for female empowerment at different levels of No-Corruption (the embedded histogram shows the distribution of No-Corruption), while on the right-hand side of we see the coefficient estimates of No-Corruption at different levels of female empowerment (histogram shown of the WPE index).

The graph reveals that only after reaching a certain level of impartiality, around 0.6 on the 0 to 1 measure of No-Corruption, there is negative effect of women empowerment on infant deaths. For comparison, the score of Bulgaria in the early 2000s and South Africa in 1995 on this measure are around 0.6. On the contrary, when corruption in societies is rampant, the inclusion and participation of women has a *positive* effect on mortality rates. In terms of size of the effects, the

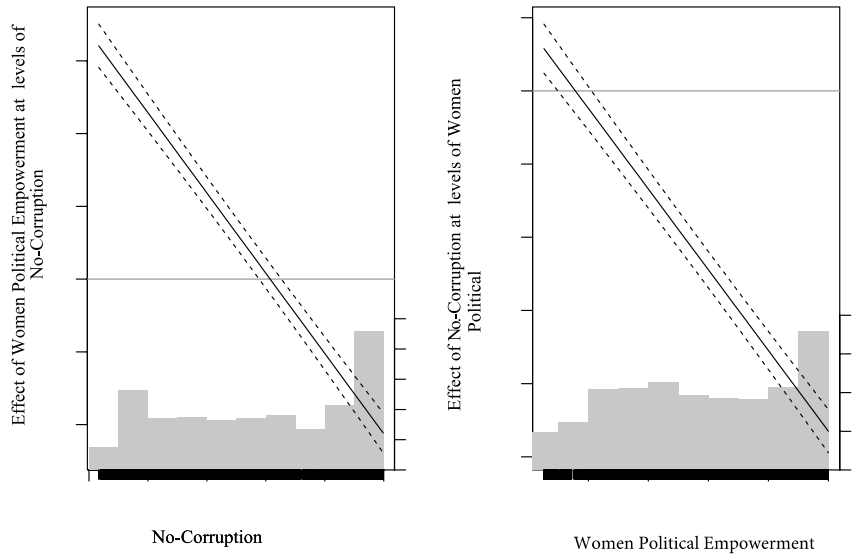


FIGURE 3 Conditional effects of the interaction between women political empowerment and no-corruption. DV, Infant mortality (log) $t + 1$.

figure shows that the coefficient estimate for WPE is 0.6 when corruption is high (at 0.2 on the No-Corruption index), indicating that a one percent increase on the WPE measure is expected to lead to an increase in log infant mortality rates by 0.6. When corruption is very low at 0.8 on the No-Corruption index, an increase in share of female legislators is associated with a *reduction* of around 0.4 in log infant mortality rates (for reference, one standard deviation of infant mortality is close to 1).

Turning to the right-hand side of the figure, the effect of corruption on reducing infant mortality becomes larger as countries become more inclusive of women. Note that when women's inclusion is extremely low (below 0.2 on the 0 to 1 measure), the effect of corruption takes positive value (meaning development is worse). As a reference point, Jordan's scores for the WPE index are close to 0.2 before the 1990s.

We now turn to Figure 4, which is the same type of graph as the previous, replicated for the interaction between corruption and the share of women in parliament. We use the estimations from Model 6 from Table 1 with full control variables. Importantly, we replicate the findings that the effects of women in parliament are initially positive (mortality increases) when corruption is high. Development is improved only when both the presence of women in parliament and corruption are improved. Further, the right-hand side of the figure shows that the effect of corruption becomes stronger as representation of women in the legislature increases. Yet, note that unlike in the previous Figure 3, the effect of the No-Corruption index remains negative at all levels of women empowerment. This small nuance comes from the slightly different factors captured with the two measures of women political representation. The WPE index captures representation beyond just the legislature, stretching to political presence of women in politics more broadly. Our results suggest that when men hold a near-monopoly of political power, the coefficient for the No-Corruption index is positive (development is worsened), while if we look only at the legislature, improvement in corruption is always associated with corresponding enhancement of development. This finding is important as it highlights the need to consider the representation of women beyond just the legislature, where most studies in gender and politics are concentrated.

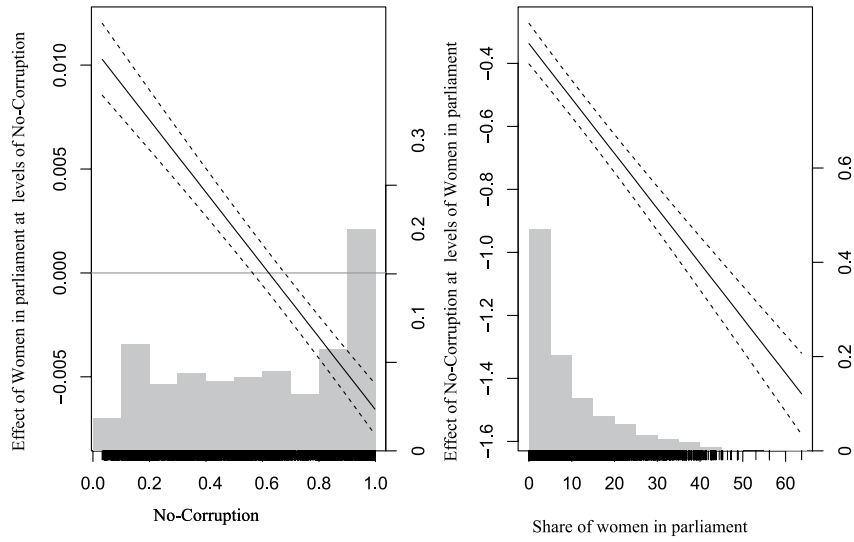


FIGURE 4 Conditional effects of the interaction between share of women in parliament and no-corruption. DV, Infant mortality (log) $t + 1$. *Y*-axis shows the size of the coefficient estimates for women in parliament (left) and corruption (right).

Finally, turning to the results from the control variables, we note that economic development and improved education are associated with lower mortality rates across all models. Urbanization and clean elections are not significant predictors of mortality in our models, but their coefficients are in the expected direction.

5.2 | Robustness checks

This section is designed to interrogate further our results by probing whether the significant results obtained are not outcome of modeling choices. We start by testing models with 5-year lags in the independent variables, presented in Table A2 in the Appendix. The model setup replicates the main table above; we note that the results remain substantively the same. Figure A1 in the Appendix visualizes the results from this model specification, and also for longer time lags of 7 and 10 years. The size of the effect (displayed on the *y*-axis) becomes smaller over time, particularly for the 7- and 10-year lags, as the effects of the independent variables on infant mortality dissipate over time.

Next, we add to the main model a variable capturing democratic experience (Gerring et al., 2012). The results are shown in Table A6, Models 3 and 4, and Figure A2. In line with previous research, democracy stock reduces infant mortality, which reduces the size of the effect of other variables. However, the main results remain the same.

In Table A3 in the Appendix, Model 1 includes also on the *y*-axis the average value for infant mortality of a country's neighbors. Models 2–5 probe whether results change when we estimate them on 5-year panels, as we add more control variables to the models. This test is intended to deal with autocorrelation, potential measurement issues, and the slow-moving nature of the variables.

The results remain largely unchanged after these additional sets of interrogations. The interaction term between corruption and women's political inclusion (measured either with the

overall index or share of women in parliament) is consistently statistically significant and with a negative sign. The measures for WPE hold a positive sign (development worsens) in the models with full control variables and year-fixed effects. The sign and direction of corruption changes depending on the model and the explanatory variable we use, as discussed in the previous section.

We also probe whether the results in women empowerment are driven by the existence of quotas. Table A4 depicts the results from the regression analysis. We mirror the presentation from the previous regression tables. Figure 5 presents graphically the results from the last model. The figure shows the predicted values of infant mortality (*y*-axis) at different levels of No-Corruption (*x*-axis), where each line represents what type of quotas exist. In general mortality decreases as corruption declines but the slope is different depending on the quota status. Importantly, the slope is less steep for countries that do not have gender quotas (blue line) compared to countries that have quotas either with (1) weak or no sanctions (green line), or (2) with strong sanctions or reserved seats (red line). This suggests that institutional efforts to increase the presence of women in general have positive effects on development. However, when corruption is high (up until 0.35 on this 0 to 1 measure), infant mortality is higher for countries that have some type of quotas or reserved seats for women compared to countries with no quota system in place. This finding goes in line with our previous results that the presence of women in politics might be used to subvert development efforts, and this could be driven by institutional efforts to increase descriptive representation.

As a final test, we check whether the results are driven by one of the sub-components of the No-Corruption index. Table A5 presents the results with separate measures for corruption in the public sector, executive, legislature, and the judiciary. We largely replicate the findings from the analysis so far: The measure for women's political participation has a positive and statistically significant coefficient across all models, and all interaction terms of WPE with the different measures of corruption are consistently significant with a negative sign. Finally, the coefficient estimate for the No-Corruption index is positive and significant for three out of four sub-components,

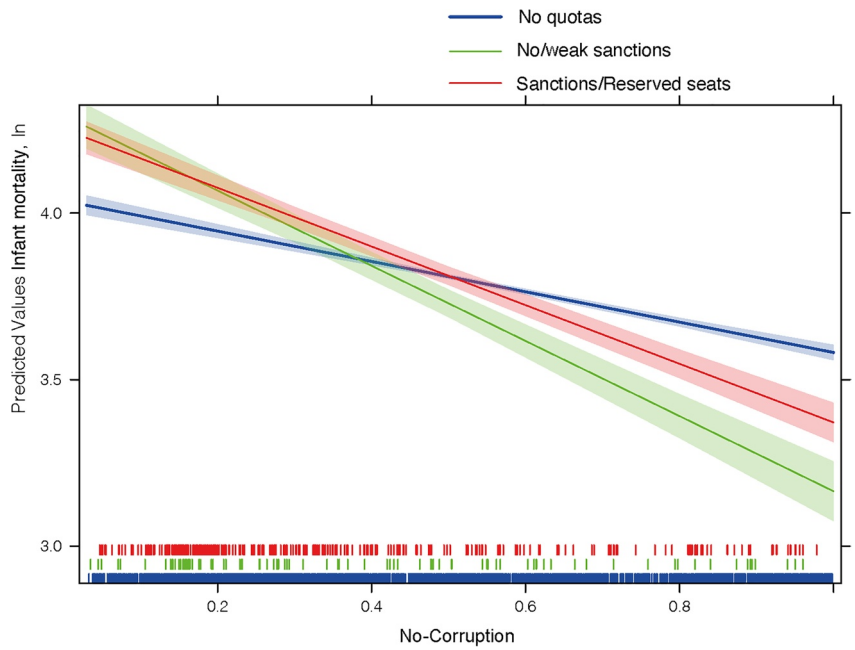


FIGURE 5 Interaction between gender quotas and no-corruption. DV, Infant mortality (log) $t + 1$.

which may indicate that when men dominate politics completely, No-Corruption is associated with higher mortality. The only exception is the No-Corruption in the legislature, for which we find no significant effect on mortality for low levels of women's empowerment, even if the interaction terms is significant. Future research could explore further the distinct effects of different types of corruption on mortality rates.

6 | CONCLUSION

Does women's presence in power make a difference for governance outcomes? In this paper we approach this question by looking at the conditions affecting the relationship between women political representation and human development. We analyze data on 180 countries around the world from 1900 until 2014 to find the following: At low levels of corruption, there is negative association between women empowerment and infant deaths—suggesting that women's empowerment is conducive to human development. On the contrary, when corruption in societies is rampant, the inclusion of women correlates with worsened mortality rates, and this effect could be driven by institutional efforts to increase women's presence such as quotas. The effect of corruption on infant mortality becomes larger as countries become more inclusive of women but that effect is observed only if men do not hold total dominance over power.

Our analysis has somewhat ambiguous policy implications. While it shows that women in power can have transformative effects on politics, it also shows that women can be used to legitimize the rule of corrupt elites that do not actually improve the situation for women and society. Due to their vulnerable position in clientelist environments and strong patriarchal norms, women might be less likely than men to rebel against the official party policy. These findings align with previous research indicating that making efforts to recruit women from diverse networks, for example, civil society organizations, is worthwhile (Bjarnegård et al., 2018).

One question that we do not engage with is whether women empowerment has the potential to break corruption practices. Some research suggests that even the entrance of women in politics is contingent on a country's levels of political corruption (Bauhr et al., 2018). Other strands of the literature suggest that women are less likely to engage in corruption practices as they are more altruistic and moral (Dollar et al., 2001), and more risk-averse than men (Esarey & Chirillo, 2013). An alternative explanation is that women simply have fewer *opportunities* to engage in corruption (Bauhr et al., 2018). A study by Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer (2019) aims to address the question about the directionality and causality in the relationship between corruption and women's political empowerment: do women in power reduce corruption, or does corruption block the way for women in politics? Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer find empirical support for both propositions, without resolving the question which one comes first. We leave this question to future research, with the warning that while women's inclusion has a strong normative power and potential for positive change, the institutional and societal environment might hinder or help realize the effects of women's empowerment.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available in V-Dem dataset at https://v-dem.net/data.html. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: V-Dem dataset, https://v-dem.net/data.html.

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ENDNOTES

[1] We use the terms political inclusion, empowerment and participation in politics as synonymous to political representation.

[2] Note that our argument is not about regime time per se. Previous research has shown that even in autocratic regimes women representatives can be successful in advancing women's interests as those do not present a threat to the regime stability, and their endorsement has to do with seeking international and domestic legitimacy (Forman-Rabinovici & Sommer, 2019). Democracy and corruption have a curvilinear relationship, where highest levels of corruption is observed in hybrid regimes (McMann et al., 2020). We argue that women's representation is undermined due to corrupt linkages that can be present both in democracies like Argentina, and electoral autocracies like Russia.

[3] For example, Olga Batalina and Elena Mizulina. Source: https://www.ft.com/content/e523d036-e482-11e6-9645-c9357a75844a.

[4] While corruption and clientelism describe different phenomena, we follow the strand of the literature which sees corruption as an "umbrella concept," including clientelism, patronage and state capture (Rothstein & Varraich, 2017). This fits the theoretical argument and the broad definition of corruption used in the paper, where corruption—misuse of public goods used for private gains, undermines the potential for accountability between voters and politicians.

[5] As comparison, while the V-Dem measure covers the years from 1900 to 2020 for virtually all countries in the world, the data set with the next big coverage is the International Country Risk Guide with coverage of 140 countries from 1984 until present. This truncated sample can have major implications for applied research as shown by Wang et al. (2019) in their study on the relationship between democracy, corruption and infant mortality. The reduced sample truncates the years when the biggest reductions of infant mortality were achieved, and introduces bias in the analysis as result of the limited subset of countries available.

[6] Since our measure of urbanization is skewed, we also present results from robustness tests where we log transform urbanization. Our results hold up to this.

[7] This variable is based on the QAROT dataset (Hughes et al., 2017).

[8] The variable uses the geographic regions of the world, as defined by the United Nations Statistics Division.

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