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Michelle Clifford
michelle.roseclifford@gmail.com

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Attitudes of Democracy: The Correlation between Corruption, Social Sexism, and Democracy

Michelle Clifford

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Abstract

Previous studies have found a correlation between gender inequality and corruption, but much debate still exists about the cause of this correlation. A common theory is that any country with little corruption and low gender inequality is a democracy and that the relationship is a spurious one that comes from the nature of democracies. Others contest that this is a reflection of women having a higher moral standard. This study measures the correlation between sexist attitudes and corruption. Measuring the attitude toward gender inequality rather than institutions, laws, or the behavior of individuals helps us better understand the culture and attitude of the people themselves. To further study the role democracy plays in this correlation, this study measures the correlation in democracies, partial democracies, and non-democracies. This study finds that overall, the three are highly correlated, suggesting that as a country becomes more democratic that transparency and gender equality increase.

Introduction

The correlation between gender equality and transparency in a country is one that has been fervently studied since the 1990s (Sung). There is an undeniable correlation between the two and it has been shown multiple times that less corruption exists in governments with higher percentages of women in its legislature and public sector. Much debate exists about the cause of this correlation. It has been argued that female politicians are overall less corrupt than their male counterparts, and thus placing more women in positions of power could reduce corruption in governments (Ionescu). Others say that the correlation between the two is due to the common context of liberal democracy and that as a country becomes more democratic, transparency and gender equality naturally increase. This debate has been called the “fairer sex versus fairer system” debate (Sung).

Clearly, much has been researched about the correlation between corruption and institutional sexism, defined here as the presence of laws and institutions that restrict the personal freedoms of women or their ability to participate in government. This study seeks to determine if there is a correlation between corruption and social sexism, defined here as the existence of sexist attitudes or ideologies in a country. While the research on the correlation of corruption with institutional sexism is essential, research about its corruption with social sexism is equally vital. The attitudes of the constituency of a country are crucial to understanding a country’s culture in a manner distinct from its institutions. For example, Rwanda at first glance has one of the smallest gender gaps in the world and has been praised for such (World Economic Forum 2018). A closer look, however, reveals that this is due to a quota the country has for female representatives in government. In matters of structural sexism such as views that it is acceptable for a husband to physically abuse a wife, Rwanda actually has mediocre scores

(OECD). From this example, it is clear that more research is needed about structural sexism to learn more about the true nature of the correlation between corruption and gender inequality.

In order to further explore the role of democracy in the correlation between structural sexism and corruption, I separately measure and compare the correlation in countries classified as free, partly free, and not free.

Review of Previous Literature

Perhaps the largest debate in the study between the correlation between corruption and gender inequality is whether the relationship is due to women having a less corrupt nature or whether it is due to the fact that by the time a government is democratic enough to have a substantial presence of female representatives that it has also democratized enough to limit corruption. It has often been referred to as the “fairer sex versus fairer system” argument (Sung 2003).

It has been found repeatedly that countries with more women in positions of power are less corrupt (Stensöta and Wängnerud, Debski, J., Jetter, M., Möslle, S., & Stadelmann, D. 2018). This has led many to question whether this is because women are overall less corrupt than men. Several studies have been conducted about whether women are less likely to accept a bribe than their male counterparts. Many have found that women are less approving of bribes and less likely to accept a bribe (Ionescu 2018; Torgler and Valev 2010; Esaray and Chirillo 2013). Another study found that men are significantly more likely to offer or accept a bribe (Rivas 2013).

Debski, Jatter, Mosle, and Stadelmann study the correlation between grand corruption and female legislative representation over time in 177 countries (2018). They also incorporate the culture of the different countries by considering the traditional views and feelings toward women in power. Their contribution focuses more on the attitude towards women in power than

other studies and asserts that once culture is controlled for, there is no effect. My research will add to that of Debski, Jatter, Mosle, and Stadelmann by looking at not only the attitudes toward women in power but also women in general.

A study of perceptions of the acceptability of corruption and gender equality adds another dimension to this study. This will lead to further insight into whether it is the structure of democracy itself that leads to less oppressive attitudes about women and less corruption or whether attitudes remain relatively unchanged concerning it. It is also important to consider the possibility that a survey question asking about general attitudes towards these issues, such as the acceptability of a husband beating a wife, will have less of a response bias than asking if individuals have actually engaged in such behavior.

Stensöta and Wängnerud conducted a study that found that countries with more women in positions of political power were overall less corrupt (Stensöta and Wängnerud 2018). Their study also examines the role of democracy in such governments and finds that the correlation is much higher in democracies than non-democracies. They place a special focus on how institutional sexism affects the relationship. My study does a similar analysis with a focus on social sexism rather than institutional sexism. This will help determine real perceptions towards sexism in countries and clarify the real perception of women in such countries, which may help solve the problem of outliers such as Rwanda as mentioned earlier.

One study finds that governments with a higher representation of female politicians are overall less corrupt than governments with a higher concentration of male politicians (Ionescu 2018). Ionescu also investigated the direct correlation of the participation of women in government and corruption and found that female politicians are less likely to be involved in corruption scandals than their male counterparts (Ionescu 2014). She finds that female politicians

view corruption as riskier than their male counterparts. This theory is crucial and enlightening in the study of the fairer sex versus fairer system debate.

One study explores the effect that corruption has on female politicians as opposed to their male counterparts (Stensöta and Wängnerud, Debski, J., Jetter, M., Möhle, S., & Stadelmann, D. 2017). Female politicians are viewed much more negatively after involvement in a corruption scandal than male politicians. Interestingly enough, they are also viewed as less competent after such a scandal. Hence, the article argues that the fact that the risk is higher for female politicians is one reason that they are less likely to get involved in such scandals. My study of general attitudes toward women contributes to this relationship of women being held more accountable after scandals.

Theory and Hypothesis

This study contributes to the “fairer sex vs fairer system argument” through this more thorough study of perceptions of the role of women and corruption. My theory is that women are just as capable of being corrupt in government as men and that the fact that governments with more female representatives are less corrupt is due to the common context of liberal democracy. This study will continue to delve further into this subject in two ways: first, by seeing if democracies do, in reality, decrease the acceptability of gender inequality, and second, by measuring whether the society’s perception of the role of women has any correlation with perceived corruption.

I hypothesize that there will be a significant relationship between social sexism, corruption, and democracy. The more democratic a country is, the less corruption and social sexism there will be. The context of liberal democracy helps to decrease traditional attitudes toward women and the existence of corruption in the public sector. I theorize that as a country

becomes more democratic, equality and transparency increase. If democracy is a common cause for both equality and transparency, less transparency can be expected in countries with greater social sexism (Beesley 2019).

I theorize that greater variation will exist in social sexism in free countries and that the least variation will be seen in countries that are not free. I do this based on the fact that individuals who live in free countries generally have less restricted access to information and have had exposure to the roles that women take in different cultures. Therefore, I predict that these countries will see more variation in social sexism. Because democracies are generally less corrupt (Transparency International 2018), I hypothesize that democracies will see less of a correlation between social sexism and corruption. I do this anticipating that free countries will see a steady level of corruption (or the lack thereof) and a greater variation of social sexism.

Similarly, I theorize that the correlation will be the most significant in countries classified as not free. Because countries that are not free generally see greater restrictions of information, individuals in these countries have not had exposure to the role of women besides the role that they take in their own country. As such, I expect that social sexism will be fairly consistent in such countries.

Research Design

I measure corruption using Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index. This index is a measure of the corruption of 180 countries as determined by experts. I divide the score by 180 to scale the results between 0 and 1. The higher the score is, the more corruption exists in the country.

To measure democracy, I use Freedom House's democracy index. This index gives each country a score from 1-100 with 1 being the least democratic and 100 being the most democratic.

As well, Freedom House has a separate classification for the countries based on regime type. Countries are classified as free, partly free, and not free. Not free is coded as 0, partly free is coded as 1, and free is coded as 2. Henceforth I refer to this score as regime type or binary democracy score.

To create a variable for social sexism, I compile data from the World Values Survey's sixth wave. I compiled responses that ranged from strongly agree to strongly disagree from the following statements: "When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women", "if a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems", "when a mother works for pay, the children suffer", "on the whole, men make better political leaders than women do", "a university education is more important for a boy than a girl", "on the whole, men make better business executives than women do", "women having the same rights as men is an essential characteristic of a democracy", and "it is justifiable for a man to beat his wife". As the response choices are on different scales (0-3, 0-10, or 0-4), I standardized them by dividing the average by the amount of response choices. In some questions, 1 is more sexist and in others 1 is less sexist, so I standardize the responses so that a higher score represents more sexism.

I regress the overall relationship between social sexism, corruption, and democracy while controlling for GDP and geographic region. Using Freedom House's binary democracy score, I regress corruption and social sexism within each regime type (free, partly free, not free).

Results

Complete List of Scores Sorted by Social Sexism

Number of Observations=59

Country	Social Sexism	Democracy	Binary Democracy Score	Region	Corruption	GPD (in millions)
Sweden	0.1356006265	100	2	6	0.01666666754	551031.6875
Netherlands	0.1479396224	99	2	6	0.04444444552	913658.5
New Zealand	0.157147184	98	2	2	0.01111111138	205024.9375
Spain	0.1797212511	94	2	6	0.2277777791	1426189.125
Australia	0.1802256107	98	2	2	0.07222222537	1432195.125
Germany	0.1926533431	94	2	6	0.06111111119	3996759.25
Slovenia	0.2030047476	93	2	6	0.200000003	54235.48047
Uruguay	0.2150081396	98	2	1	0.1277777851	59596.89063
United States of America	0.2186782658	86	2	1	0.122222224	20494100
Poland	0.2353889346	85	2	6	0.200000003	585782.875
Brazil	0.2464945018	78	2	1	0.5833333135	1868626.125
Peru	0.248367548	73	2	1	0.5833333135	222237.5625
Chile	0.2498984933	94	2	1	0.150000006	298231.125

Cyprus	0.2510663271	94	2	6	0.2111111134	24469.83984
Taiwan	0.2523136437	93	2	2	0.1722222269	589906
Trinidad and Tobago	0.2588522136	81	2	1	0.4333333373	23410.34961
Estonia	0.2607043684	94	2	6	0.1000000015	30284.89063
Colombia	0.2616704702	65	1	1	0.5500000119	330227.875
Mexico	0.264693439	62	1	1	0.7666666508	1223808.875
Qatar	0.2699282467	24	0	4	0.1833333373	192009.3438
Ecuador	0.2704658806	60	1	1	0.6333333254	108398.0625
Ukraine	0.2820400596	62	1	3	0.1222222224	130832.3672
Thailand	0.290138185	31	0	2	0.5500000119	504992.75
Georgia	0.2966360152	64	1	3	0.2277777791	16209.82031
Korea, South	0.2970245183	84	2	2	0.25	1619423.75
Hong Kong	0.2999482155	59	1	2	0.07777778059	362992.5313
Japan	0.3004273176	96	2	2	0.1000000015	4970915.5
Russia	0.3132290244	20	2	3	0.7666666508	1657553.75
Belarus	0.3155072927	21	0	3	0.3888888955	59662.5
Singapore	0.3243385553	52	1	2	0.01666666754	364156.6563
Kazakhstan	0.335847199	22	0	3	0.6888889074	170538.875

Azerbaijan	0.3465387523	12	0	3	0.8444444537	46939.53125
Zimbabwe	0.3492389023	30	0	5	0.8888888955	31000.51953
China	0.3507084548	14	0	2	0.4833333194	136078144
Lebanon	0.3575025201	43	1	4	0.7666666508	56639.16016
India	0.359780252	77	2	2	0.4333333373	2726322.5
Morocco	0.3622270525	39	1	4	0.4055555463	118495.3281
Rwanda	0.3625654876	23	2	5	0.2666666806	9509
Turkey	0.3632711768	32	0	3	0.4333333373	766509.0625
South Africa	0.3635072708	78	2	5	0.4055555463	368288.1875
Malaysia	0.3680849373	45	1	2	0.3388888836	354348.4063
Kyrgyzstan	0.3683084249	37	1	3	0.7333333492	8092.839844
Egypt	0.3696309328	26	0	4	0.5833333135	250895.4688
Philippines	0.3702229559	62	1	2	0.5500000119	330910.3438
Ghana	0.3750013411	83	2	5	0.4333333373	6556.459961
Tunisia	0.3942658603	70	2	4	0.4055555463	39860.71875
Kuwait	0.3951084614	36	1	4	0.4333333373	141677.8125
Romania	0.3960740566	84	2	6	0.3388888836	239552.5156
Pakistan	0.3999942541	43	1	2	0.6499999762	312570.0625

Iraq	0.4039515853	31	0	4	0.9888888597	225914.1875
Armenia	0.4071838558	45	1	3	0.5833333135	12433.08984
Algeria	0.4127184451	35	0	4	0.3388888836	180689.125
Uzbekistan	0.4177136123	7	0	3	0.8777777553	50499.92188
Libya	0.4192752838	64	1	4	0.944444418	48319.62109
Nigeria	0.4261962473	50	1	5	0.8000000119	397269.625
Jordan	0.4280702472	37	1	4	0.3222222328	42290.82813
Haiti	0.4290120006	41	1	1	0.8944444656	9658.080078
Yemen	0.4382088184	13	0	4	0.9777777791	26914.40039

(Table 1)

Table 1 is a breakdown of each country's score of social sexism, corruption, democracy score, freedom rating, region, and GDP. The countries are sorted from low to high amounts of social sexism with Sweden, the Netherlands, and New Zealand with the least amount of sexism and Jordan, Haiti, and Yemen with the most social sexism. These scores were according to responses about questions about the acceptability of a man beating his wife, a university education being more important for a boy than for a girl, etc. Countries with higher scores of social sexism tended to agree more with those statements while countries with lower scores disagreed with them. These scores ranged from 0.136 (Sweden) to 0.438 (Yemen).

Democracy scores range from 1-100. Higher scores of democracy mean a country is more democratic and the lower the country is ranked, the less democratic the country is. The binary

Regression of Corruption, Social Sexism and Democracy.
Number of Observations=59

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Corruption	0.1008366	0.0356368	2.83	0.007**	0.0293262 - 0.1723471
GDP (in millions)	-1.99e-10	4.34e-10	-0.46	0.649	-1.07e-09 - 6.72e-10
Region	0.0041737	0.0045658	0.91	0.365	-0.0049882 - 0.0133357
Democracy	-0.0013276	0.0003536	-3.75	0.000***	-0.0020371 - -0.0006181
Constant	0.3360648	0.038054	8.83	0.000***	0.2597039 - 0.4124257

(Table 2)

Table 2 shows a regression of corruption, social sexism, and democracy that controls for world region and democracy. It shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the three factors. As democracy increases, corruption and social sexism decrease. GDP and region have no statistically significant impact on the relationship. This suggests that the theory that the correlation between corruption and sexism is due to the common context of liberal democracy could be possible.

Regression of Corruption and Social Sexism in Democracies

Number of observations=24

Social Sexism	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Corruption Perception Index	-0.3313688	.0706495	-4.69	0.000**	-0.4778868 – -0.1848507
Constant	0.4548902	0.0441201	10.31	0.000**	0.3633907 – 0.5463897

(Table 3)

Corruption	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Social Sexism	2.669798	1.744964	1.53	0.165	-1.354097 - 6.693692
GDP (in millions)	-1.00e-09	2.26e-09	-0.44	0.670	-6.22e-09 - 4.22e-09
Coded Region	-.0047818	.1028861	-0.05	0.964	-.2420376 .232474
Constant	-.3083665	.6294741	-0.49	0.637	-1.759936 1.143203

(Table 4)

Tables 3 and 4 are a regression of social sexism and corruption in the countries that participated in the World Values Survey that were classified as “free” by Freedom House. Table 2 regresses only social sexism and corruption and shows a significant relationship with an extremely low p-value. Table 3 conducts the same regression with a control for GDP and world region. With these variables taken into account, there is no effect. In the future, a study with more data could prove insightful and potentially show more of a significance.

Regression of Corruption and Social Sexism in Partial Democracies

Number of Observations=19

Social Sexism	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Corruption Perception Index	-0.104711	0.0785759	-1.33	-0.200	-0.2704917 - 0.0610697
Constant	0.3958158	0.0339254	11.67	0.000	0.3242395 -0 .4673921

(Table 5)

Corruption	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Social Sexism	2.720337	1.300149	2.09	0.054	-.0508651 -5.491539
GDP (in millions)	1.84e-07	2.51e-07	0.74	0.473	-3.50e-07 - 7.19e-07
Coded Region	-.0450356	.0615034	-0.73	0.475	-0.1761271 - 0 .0860559
Constant	-.3685854	.4413141	-0.84	0.417	-1.309224 - 0.5720534

(Table 6)

Shown in Tables 5 and 6 are a regression of social sexism and corruption in the countries who participated in the World Values Survey that were classified as “partly free”. Table 2 regresses only social sexism and corruption and finds that the relationship is not statistically significant. Table 3 conducts the same regression with a control for GDP and world region. With these variables taken into account, there is no effect. In the future, a study with more data could prove insightful and potentially show more of a significance. This study concedes that the definition of “partly free” is very loosely defined. One possibility for this range of attitudes about women is the fact that “partly free” democracies can include failed democracies, governments that are transitioning from a democracy where women had a less traditional role, governments transitioning from an autocracy in which women played less of a public role, and that “partly free” countries can have a varying amount of exposure to information. Citizens of a country with

limited information may not have been exposed to women in any role besides that of their traditional role as mothers.

Regression of Corruption and Social Sexism in Autocracies

Number of Observations=13

Social Sexism	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Corruption Perception Index	-0.29031	0.0799278	-3.63	0.004**	-0.4662299 - -0.1143901
Constant	0.4536322	0.0279061	16.26	0.000*	0.3922112 - 0.5150532

(Table 7)

Corruption	Coefficient	Standard Error	T-Value	P-Value	95% Confidence Interval
Social Sexism	1.439445	.413439	3.48	0.002**	0.5820246 - 2.296865
GDP (in millions)	-7.98e-09	8.29e-09	-0.96	0.346	-2.52e-08 - 9.21e-09
Coded Region	-.0248643	.0155427	-1.60	0.124	-0.0570979 - 0.0073694
Constant	-.0143325	.1314605	-0.11	0.914	-0.2869649 - 0.2582998

(Table 8)

We see in tables 7 and 8 a regression of social sexism and corruption in the countries which participated in the World Values Survey that were classified as “not free” by Freedom House. In Table 6, only social sexism and corruption are regressed and a significant relationship is found. In Table 7, however, the regression controls for GDP and world region. The relationship between social sexism and corruption is still highly significant with a p-value of 0.002. While it must be conceded that there were only 13 observations, this connection is enlightening and merits further study. A possible explanation for this correlation is that autocracies generally have very restricted information. They have never been exposed to a world in which a woman can take on more than a role as a mother or wife and take any place in the

public sector. The limited exposure and information could be a possible explanation for the limited perspectives of women.

Mean Social Sexism and Corruption by Regime Type

Binary Democracy	Social Sexism	Corruption
Free	0.3587232	0.632906
Partly Free	0.354262	0.5166667
Not Free	0.2613438	0.2583333
Total	0.313609	0.4269157

(Table 9)

Table 9 shows the mean of social sexism and corruption based on regime type (free, partly free, or not free) as defined by Freedom House. Corruption as measured by Transparency International decreases steadily from free to partly free to not free. On the other hand, there is very little difference in social sexism in free countries and partly free countries, although the two are significantly different from social sexism in not free countries. Again, it must be noted that the definition of partly free is loose, but these observations are nonetheless fascinating and merits further study.

Standard Deviation of Corruption and Social Sexism by Regime Type

Regime Type	Social Sexism	Corruption
Not Free	0.0501503	0.2643657
Partly Free	0.059495	0.2775246
Free	0.0776793	0.196483
Total	0.0809623	0.2851209

(Table 10)

Table 10 relates the standard deviation of corruption and social sexism within regime type. As I hypothesized, the least variation is found in social sexism in countries classified as not free. The greatest standard deviation is found in free countries. This suggests that the theory of the varying restriction of information and exposure to other countries in different regime types could be a possibility.

Implications and Limitations

This data suggests that the overall correlation between gender inequality and corruption holds fast not only with institutional sexism, but also social sexism. As democracy increases, corruption and social sexism decrease. While this study does no research into the direction of causation, it is clear that the three factors are highly correlated. The data implies that as a society decreases in sexist attitudes, transparency will increase which can in turn limit corruption. If a

government wanted to decrease corruption or become more democratic, the bureaucrats could consider working to construct a culture with less social sexism.

In countries in which corruption is high, social sexism is likewise prominent. This correlation holds true in free and not free countries, but the relationship between the two is insignificant in partly free countries. However, once GDP and region are controlled for, the relationship is only significant in countries that are not free. This correlation is especially interesting and the cause for this correlation is unclear. It could be possible that this correlation is due to the restricted information in countries which are not free. Because these countries have less exposure to various cultures, its constituents may never have seen women step outside of their traditional role or participate meaningfully in the public sector. Free countries and partly free countries, on the other hand, generally have more information and therefore have had more exposure to the roles of women in different countries. This exposure could possibly lead to a variation of opinions about the role of women.

As seen in Table 9, the mean corruption of regime types decreases steadily from free countries to partly free to not free. Interestingly, there is very little difference in social sexism in free countries and partly free countries, although the two are significantly different from social sexism in not free countries. It must be noted that the “partly free” is loosely defined, but these observations are nonetheless fascinating and merits further study.

It must be noted that this dataset only measures 59 countries. Once this group is divided into “free”, “partly free”, and “not free”, the datasets become relatively small. If a larger, more comprehensive dataset were to undergo similar tests, the results could continue to shed light on this correlation.

Conclusion

The “fairer sex versus fairer system” debate is one that has been studied by many in order to determine the true causality of the connection between percentage of women in legislature and corruption in the governments.

Those on the “fairer sex” side of the debate do have compelling evidence. It has been argued that female politicians are overall less corrupt than their male counterparts, and thus placing more women in positions of power could reduce corruption in governments. Meanwhile, those on the “fairer system” side suggest that the correlation between the two is due to the common context of liberal democracy and that as a country becomes more democratic, transparency and gender equality naturally increase.

The correlation between corruption and institutional sexism has been studied frequently. However, I believe that in order to determine if the system of democracy truly has an impact on gender equality, the presence of women in the public sector does not present the entirety of the issue. This study looked into attitudes toward women, such as whether it is acceptable for a man to beat his wife, whether equal rights for women is an important measure of a true democracy, etc. It found that there is a clear correlation between democracy, social sexism, and corruption. However, within regime types, the correlation is most significant within countries that are not free.

This study found that democracy, social sexism, and corruption are significantly related. Within separate regime types, however, after GDP and regime type are controlled for, the relationship is only significant within countries that are not free. It is possible that if the same regression were performed on a larger dataset, the relationship could be more significant.

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