Candidate sex, corruption and vote choice

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Existing research suggests that voters may view female politicians as less prone to corruption than male politicians. We argue that this voter belief can yield advantages to hypothetical female candidates as voters sometimes punish them less for bribe accusations. We test these propositions with hypothetical vignettes of subnational executive races in Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. We find that only Uruguayans prefer allegedly corrupt female over male candidates, but when Uruguayans are told that hypothetical corruption is widespread, they do not prefer accused females. Moreover, voters in none of the countries prefer females among candidates who have fought corruption. Our findings thereby demonstrate that voters' preferences for corrupt female candidates in hypothetical races can vary not only according to the specific justifications for the wrongdoing, but also across countries.

Voters may view female politicians as less prone to corruption than male politicians (Barnes and Beaulieu 2014, Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2019; Goetz 2007; Stensöta and Wängnerud 2018).[2] Experimental studies also reveal a baseline voter preference for female candidates (Aguilar et al. 2015; Teele et al. 2018; Schwarz et al. 2018). However, other research suggests that citizens penalize female politicians more when they underperform, particularly in the area of corruption (Eggers et al. 2017; Reyes-Housholder, 2020; Carlin et al. 2019).

This paper explores voter preferences for politically experienced female and male candidates in hypothetical elections marked by corruption. How might information about past corruption performance influence vote choice for hypothetical female and male candidates? Could the impact of candidate sex on voter preferences vary across countries?

Essentialism and structuralism provide distinct, but complementary, logics, which could move voters to assume that male politicians will perform worse than their female counterparts on the valence issue of corruption. We argue that in consequence, voters sometimes, but not always, prefer hypothetical female candidates accused of corruption over their equally corrupt male counterparts. However, the idea of endemic corruption could undermine voters' intuitions of the probity of women candidates. As a result, when told in a hypothetical vignette that corruption is widespread, voters do not choose females who are just as corrupt as their male counterparts. Finally, because eradicating corruption implicitly requires a mix of traits that are stereotypically feminine (probity) and masculine (toughness), candidate sex is unlikely to impact voters' preferences among hypothetical candidates who have punished corrupt civil servants in the past.

We analyze data from multiple population-based survey experiments, applying the same tests of our gender and corruption voting theory to three countries (Klašnja et al. 2020). This enables us to rigorously probe scholarly intuitions that, since stereotypes are culturally constructed, the causal effect of candidate sex on voter preferences varies across countries. A path-breaking line of survey experiments suggests that voters sometimes associate candidates' sex with moral integrity (Barnes et al. 2018; Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019), but this influential scholarship primarily analyzes convenience samples from the

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low-corruption case of the United States. A nationally representative online survey focuses on the country case of Spain (Wiesehomeier et al., n.d.). Other research compares two countries, but still relies on non-representative samples, thereby limiting generalizability (Schwindt-Bayer et al. 2018; Benstead and Lust, 2018).

This study's data are nationally representative samples from three countries that vary in terms of overall corruption levels: Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile (Klašnja et al. 2020; Mutz 2011). Following other candidate sex and corruption studies (Wiesehomeier et al., n.d.), we use hypothetical vignettes about sub-national executive races to investigate voter preferences beyond affinities for individual, real-life male or female politicians. Mayors in these countries possess significant powers to either exacerbate or eradicate corruption by punishing civil servants for wrongdoing. A conjoint design facilitates simultaneous estimation of the causal impact of candidate sex, corruption performance, partisanship, and economic conditions (Hainmueller et al. 2014).

Results show that it is only in the low-corruption country of Uruguay where hypothetical female candidates, accused of accepting bribes, sometimes enjoy an electoral edge over their equally accused male counterparts. Uruguayans indeed punish female candidates less for corruption when justifications for alleged malfeasance are either unspecified or posit side benefits in the form of job creation. However, Uruguayan voters do not prefer allegedly corrupt female candidates when voters learn that hypothetical corruption is widespread or when both candidates are praised for their corruption-fighting efforts.

These "positive" findings detected in Uruguay help confirm existing experimental studies (Wiesehomeier et al, n.d.). The null findings from Argentina and Chile nevertheless cast doubt on universalist conclusions concerning causal impact of candidate sex on voter preferences. Moreover, the positive impacts of candidate sex on corrupt candidates are statistically different between Uruguay and Chile, but not between Uruguay and Argentina. This study therefore calls for additional research on the country-level factors that could also mitigate differential effects of candidate sex on voter preferences in elections marked by corruption.

This article contributes to the burgeoning literature on gender and corruption by articulating reasons why voters may sometimes, but not always, slightly prefer corrupt female over male candidates. We also stress that these pro-female biases could vary geographically. This study is the first, to our knowledge, that probes the causal effects of candidate sex on voter preferences with comparative data from three population-based survey experiments, demonstrating that pro-female biases can exist, but not in all countries. Although our research design cannot identify a particular cause for these country-level differences, follow-up studies can systematically theorize and test the country-level conditions under which women do and do not enjoy electoral benefits. Based on our knowledge of these countries, we suggest future research to explore whether and how these countries' different histories of corruption scandals involving women in political office could impact voters' preferences for female candidates.

1. Voter preferences for female candidates in contexts of corruption

Understanding voting behavior in real-life elections requires examining citizens' *a priori* preferences, the focus of this study. Corruption—defined as the abuse of power for personal gain—constitutes a valence issue (Stokes 1963; Pavão 2018). Citizens desire cleaner government and often perceive differences in politicians' willingness and abilities to achieve this. Our theory applies to hypothetical elections when voters receive information about candidates' past performance on

corruption, which raises this issue's saliency (Boas et al. 2018; Weitz-Shapiro and Winters 2016; Winters and Weitz-Shapiro 2013).[3] Citizens voting in such elections have reason to consider candidates' past performances on corruption to make inferences concerning their future performance once in office.

Emerging research maintains that many voters believe—rightly or wrongly—that female politicians are more honest than male politicians (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2019). U.S. voters assume female candidates are less likely to commit electoral fraud (Barnes and Beaulieu, 2014). Polling shows that in 2012, 32% of South Americans affirmed that male politicians are more corrupt but just 5% claimed that female politicians are more corrupt (The Americas Barometer, 2012). If voters indeed presume that women are less likely to abuse power, this could mean that some voters expect female candidates to outperform their male counterparts on this valence issue. One study found that Spaniards select hypothetical female over male candidates in contexts of corruption, even when female candidates are charged with embezzlement (Wiesehomeier et al., n.d.).

We broadly conceptualize candidates' corruption performances as ranging from poor (engaging in corruption) to strong (fighting corruption). Building on theories of corruption and electoral accountability (Klašnja et al. 2020, Klašnja et al. 2016), we also discuss possible justifications for poor corruption performances. Such justifications have been shown to mitigate voters' punishment of corrupt incumbents and thereby undermine accountability.

To start, we posit that two complementary lines of reasoning could move voters to anticipate superior performance among female politicians on this valence issue. The first rests on essentialist assumptions about women's—and by extension female candidates'—inherent natures. According to this, all women are born with attributes that would enhance their performance on corruption (Goertz and Mazur, 2008). Ideas about maternal instincts could move voters to assume that female candidates are more honest, less driven by selfish interests and more likely to prioritize the good of others. Voters may believe that because women are inherently more cautious, they are less likely to break the law and risk being caught (Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2017). In sum, ideas about women's innate virtues could prompt voters to assume that female candidates will outperform men on corruption, ceteris paribus.

Voters who eschew essentialism may still conclude that female candidates are less inclined to exacerbate corruption. An alternative, but complementary, line of voter reasoning recognizes how structural factors could prevent or dissuade female politicians from behaving corruptly (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019). Corruption depends on informal networks of trust, which men tend to dominate (Bjarnegård, 2013). Voters may deduce that given women's historical marginalization, women candidates have less access to these elite political networks and hence fewer opportunities to engage in malfeasance.[4] Structuralist reasoning may work less well in settings where women have long made progress in obtaining political office. However, males still continue to dominate virtually all political spheres. Thus, even if female candidates have experience in political office, voters still might believe they are less inserted into the traditionally male-dominated networks. In short, structuralist-minded voters can come to infer that this outsider status will enable women in office to outperform their male counterparts on corruption.

What happens when candidates themselves are accused of corruption? Do voters punish female and male candidates differently? The

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[3] Respondents in our study live in countries with varying levels of actual corruption, but all respondents were primed to think about corruption, further discussed below.

[4] Women politicians may also be dissuaded from corruption because they may have more to lose if they are caught: they may believe that voters hold them to higher standards (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2017; Eggers et al. 2017).

discussion so far has implicitly conceptualized gender stereotypes as descriptive, meaning voters take candidates to act similarly according to their group membership. Voters, however, could assume that women normatively *should*—rather than actually *do*—act more ethically than men. If stereotypes are prescriptive, then voters would hold these women to higher standards, punishing female candidates more than male candidates for poor performance on corruption.

Existing evidence that voters employ prescriptive stereotypes, however, is mixed, and the strongest findings come from studies based on cross-national, time-series data rather than experimental studies based on hypothetical candidates (Reyes-Housholder, 2020). One influential experiment shows that U.S. voters do not maintain double standards for female and male candidates (Brooks and Jordan, 2013). Women voters in the U.K. indeed punish female candidates more for corruption, but men voters punish females and males similarly (Eggers et al. 2017). Another landmark study even revealed that Spanish voters choose corrupt female candidates over corrupt male candidates (Wiesehomeier et al., n.d.), a finding that contradicts predictions that prescriptive gender stereotypes related to moral integrity will hurt women.

2. Candidate sex, past corruption performance and voter preferences

Focused on voters' *a priori* preferences, our theory of gender and corruption voting aligns with this research that voters may employ gendered heuristics to punish accused female candidates *less* rather than more at the polls. Drawing on insights from corruption accountability research, we argue that voter preferences for corrupt female over male candidates could depend on the kind of justification for the alleged wrongdoing.

First, a growing body of work argues that certain justifications for corruption can mitigate voters' punishment of politicians who indulge in malfeasance (Klašnja et al. 2016; Klašnja et al. 2020). Voters may punish candidates less for corruption when "everyone is doing it," as the widespread nature of corruption may prompt voters to disregard this as relevant voting information (Pavão 2018). Moreover, voters may punish candidates less when corruption is thought to benefit voters, particularly when the corrupt decision-making resulted in side benefits in the form of increased employment (Klašnja et al. 2020). Voters are more likely to excuse candidates' dishonesty and approve of their performance when they engage in corruption for sociotropic reasons such as this job creation for citizens.

We intervene into debates on the role of corruption justifications by theorizing on their potentially gendered impacts on vote choice. In so doing, we draw together two previously disconnected literatures: 1. research on gender and corruption; and 2. research on corruption accountability. Following the previous theoretical section, we point out that essentialist-minded voters could assume that female politicians, inherently more concerned about society, engage in corruption for comparatively virtuous rather than egotistical reasons, for example, in order to bring societal benefits to citizens. Structuralist-minded voters would assume that since female politicians are more concerned about losing elections (Lazarus and Amy, 2018), female politicians are more likely to only engage in morally justifiable corruption. The reasons for the corruption could render such accusations as more excusable in the minds of voters who, in turn, would be less likely to punish these female candidates.

Corrupt candidates' sex could affect perceptions of the magnitude of corruption. Essentialist and structuralist reasoning also could move voters to calculate that accused female candidates may have engaged in corruption to a comparatively lesser extent than their male counterparts. Relatedly, voters may suspect the accusations against the female candidate to have a lower probability of being true than accusations against the male candidate. To sum up, voters may view corrupt female candidates as more likely to have committed the corruption for morally justifiable reasons, and even if equally inexcusable, females may still be

viewed as less corrupt or less likely to be truly corrupt than their male counterparts. Voters therefore will support hypothetical female candidates who are accused of corruption more than their equally accused male counterparts. This generates our first hypothesis:

$H_{corrupt}$: voters prefer allegedly corrupt female candidates over their male counterparts

The above discussion suggested voters may use the sex of hypothetical candidates to impute justifications for the corruption. But what happens when voters are told candidates' justification for the corruption? We argue that whether voters prefer corrupt females could depend on the ostensible reason or intent for the wrongdoing. Specifically, the essentialist and structuralist logics could move voters to continue to prefer corrupt females over males whose corruption produced side benefits to voters. Again, voters may perceive females as less corrupt or less likely to be truly corrupt than their male counterparts.

$H_{corruptsidebenefits}$: when told corruption brought jobs, voters prefer allegedly corrupt female candidates over their male counterparts

Existing research on corruption voting mitigation moreover argues that voters tend to forgive accused candidates when voters are told corruption is a common practice (Klašnja et al. 2020). We argue that this justification will likely override or contradict any *a priori* preference for corrupt females over corrupt males. The notion that "everyone is doing it" can dismantle essentialist and structuralist logics as it suggests that perhaps women in politics actually are different from women more generally (Schneider and Bos 2014). When told that hypothetical corruption is widespread, essentialist-minded voters thus are more likely to doubt their own implicit beliefs that all women are inherently more honest than men. Moreover, this same information could promote structuralist-minded voters to doubt their own belief that women—particularly women with experience in corruption-stained politics—are less inserted into corrupt networks. This discussion leads to our second and third hypotheses of null effects:

$H_{corruptwidespread}$: when told corruption is widespread, voters do not prefer allegedly corrupt female candidates

The above hypotheses only consider voters' reactions to accused candidates. What happens among candidates with strong past performances on this issue, specifically those who are praised for punishing civil servants for malfeasance? We argue that if both candidates fought corruption, the essentialist and structuralist logics provide indeterminant predictions on whether voters would prefer females over males. On the one hand, essentialist-minded voters might assume that women's inherent moral integrity would move them to punish civil servants to a greater degree than their male counterparts. Existing theories of candidate sex and corruption nevertheless tend to emphasize voters' ideas of women's personal integrity. Such theories therefore have more to say about what voters think female candidates would *not* do rather than what they *would* do. Even if some politicians are intrinsically moral or structurally have fewer opportunities to indulge in corruption, strong performance on the issue of corruption requires additional qualities beyond individual probity.

This study has conceptualized strong corruption performance as punishing subordinates for their wrongdoing, that is, working to eradicate corruption. Strong performance on this issue therefore requires politicians to discipline civil servants, some of whom may be party militants or even party leaders. Such tasks qualities such as assertiveness, toughness and risk-taking, each of which tend to be associated more with male than female politicians (Schneider and Bos 2014). Strong corruption performance therefore presupposes a mix of traits: probity, which is stereotypically feminine, as well as assertiveness, toughness and risk-taking, which are stereotypically masculine. This discussion generates our final hypothesis:

$H_{fightcorruption}$: Voters do not prefer female over male candidates who have punished civil servants for corruption.

3. Why hypothetical mayoral elections in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile?

We use hypothetical vignettes about mayors to investigate citizen preferences for female or male candidates. Mayors manage significant material resources—sometimes more than national-level legislators—and thus are well-positioned to either fight or engage in corruption (Ferraz and Finan 2011; Bauhr et al. 2019). Presidents also wield significant power over corruption, but voters in countries with recently elected female presidents are more likely to equate female presidential candidates—even hypothetical ones—with their current or recent female president.[5] We follow experimental studies on the impact of candidate sex in looking at sub-national offices (Schwindt-Bayer and Reyes-Housholder, 2017; Wiesehomeier et al., n.d.). Doing so can allow us to better tap into a broader set of voter preferences for female or male candidates.

We have argued so far that the essentialist and structuralist reasoning outlined above can complement each other, prompting voters to sometimes prefer corrupt female over male candidates. We have also maintained that both kinds of voter reasoning, which may result in a small pro-female bias, rest on tenuous—potentially country-specific-—foundations. Some gender stereotypes do persist over long periods of time and across many countries (Ellemers 2018). However, voters could have clearer or more rigid expectations of which qualities are characteristic of women in general than specifically of female politicians. Voters' stereotypes of women also may be more rigid and difficult to change than stereotypes of women in politics. College students in the U. S. are more likely to attribute moral integrity to "women in general" than to "female politicians" (Schneider and Bos 2014). In short, the notion that female politicians are more honest than their male counterparts may not be "universal," as some scholarship on candidate sex and corruption suggests (Goetz, 2007; Wiesehomeier et al, n.d. pg. 1).

A plethora of country-level factors could influence whether voters associate women in politics with greater moral integrity than men in politics, and hence, the impact of candidate sex on vote choice. For example, corruption accusations against real-life female politicians could move voters to not attribute greater probity to female candidates. Voters in countries such as these might calculate that hypothetical female and male candidates for office will perform similarly on corruption. Structuralist-minded voters may not view female candidates as outsiders when women occupy highly visible posts, particularly those in national legislatures, executive cabinets and the presidency (Morgan and Buice 2013). The nature of political competition may obligate office-seeking women to acquire comparable access to lucrative corruption networks in order to stand for election (Bjarnegård, 2013). If voters perceive politics as a process that weeds out honest individuals, they might assume that hypothetical male and female candidates, if elected, would have similar opportunities and incentives to indulge in illegal acts.

Our theory stops short of predicting what kinds of countries might feature voters who are more or less likely to choose corrupt female over male candidates. We nevertheless do maintain that voter preferences for corrupt female candidates could vary across countries. We test our hypotheses by analyzing experimental evidence that is representative of three countries in Latin America's Southern Cone: Uruguay, Argentina and Chile.

To be clear, we did not pre-select these countries, as the experimental data that we analyze were originally generated to study corruption voting (Klašnja et al., 2020). Nevertheless, these countries indeed vary in theoretically relevant ways for our gender and corruption voting theory. Notable similarities among these countries include their

multi-party presidential systems, histories of bureaucratic authoritarianism, and women's pro-democracy movements in the 1980s (Htun 2003; Schwindt-Bayer and Leslie, 2018; Jaquette 2009). About 11–12% of mayors in each of these countries were women at the time of the survey fieldwork, and gender gaps in voter turnout and political interest are similar in these countries (See Table 1 in Appendix). Potentially relevant differences among these countries include their historic levels of corruption and women's participation in national (rather than sub-national) politics. We elaborate on these similarities and differences below.

Uruguay constitutes a theoretically relevant country upon which to test our theory first because it historically and currently features low levels of overall corruption, ranking 21 out of 176 countries worldwide according to the Transparency International Corruption Index. Only 1% of Uruguayans said that corruption is the "most important problem" in their country. Uruguayans seem to worry more about the economy and security, with 31% and 39%, respectively, citing these as the country's most important problem. Few Uruguayans have personally experienced corruption, and they seem comparatively intolerant of corruption: only 3% of respondents report having to pay a bribe according to LAPOP surveys, and just 10% said that bribes could be justified. Given this general sketch of Uruguay, it is unsurprising that only 10% of Uruguayans believe "all politicians are corrupt," and 87% believe that some, half, or most politicians are corrupt. 3% of Uruguayans affirmed that no politicians are corrupt.

Uruguay has relatively lower rates of women's participation in national-level offices (Johnson 2018). This country implemented a gender quota in 2014, a later date than most other countries in the region.[6] Women's presence in cabinets during this study's survey fieldwork falls below the regional average, and no woman has ever mounted a viable presidential campaign in Uruguay.

Argentina contrasts with Uruguay in ways that speak to our theoretical discussion. Argentina, ranked 95 according to Transparency International, represents the most corrupt country in our study, with levels of corruption approximating Brazil's. Argentines have the most personal experiences with corruption, as 8% said that they were offered a bribe in the previous 12 months, but Argentines are similarly tolerant of corruption as Uruguayans, with just 10% of Argentines saying that bribes could be justified. About one in four Argentines say that "all politicians are corrupt," and 73% said that most, half or some are. Just 1% of Argentines said that no politicians are corrupt. Despite Argentina's high perception of corruption, only 4% cite corruption as the country's most important problem, probably due to more pressing economic concerns revealed in the high percentage (47%) who declare that economic-related issues are the most important problem. Just 16% cite security it as the country's most important problem.

Uruguay and Argentina also differ in terms of women's political participation. Argentina has historically enjoyed a strong female presence in politics (Barnes and Jones 2018). The world's first female president, Isabel Perón, rose to power in Argentina in 1974. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner (2007–2015) won the presidency in 2007 and 2011. Argentina also became the first country in the world to mandate legislative gender quotas in 1991, and since then, women's legislative presence has been consistently solid.

In short, Uruguay offers a useful case of a low-corruption country featuring no widespread reports of corrupt female leaders, while Argentina contrasts as a clear-cut instance of a high-corruption country with several ongoing reports of corrupt female leaders. Chile presents a more complicated case that shares some features with Uruguay and others with Argentina.

Chile, ranked 24 according to Transparency International, historically has featured levels of corruption similar to Uruguay, but far more

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[5] Specifically, Argentines may implicitly or unconsciously substitute "female presidential candidate" for former President Cristina Fernández. Chileans may do the same for former President Michelle Bachelet.

[6] Uruguay's quota nevertheless was implemented prior to Chile's, as mentioned below.

Chileans (13%) cite corruption as the country's most important problem. Chileans appear relatively less concerned about economic and security issues, with just 22% and 24%, respectively, naming these as the country's most important problem. Only 5% of Chileans have personally experienced corruption, and 17% said that bribes could be justified. Chile approximates Argentina in terms of perceptions of corruption and politicians. 29% of Chileans believe "all politicians are corrupt; " 70% say that most, half or some politicians are corrupt; and 1% say that no politicians are corrupt.

Chile also looks more like Argentina and less like Uruguay in terms of women's political participation at the national level. Chile historically has lagged behind in the region in terms of legislative participation, but recently made progress. It implemented legislative gender quotas in 2017, which resulted in women winning about 22% of national legislative offices, close to the region's average. Chile experienced a gender parity cabinet for the first time in 2006. Finally, Chileans, like their Argentinian counterparts, have elected a female president twice: Michelle Bachelet (2006–10; 2014–18).

4. Research design

We evaluate our hypotheses with population-based experimental data from multiple countries (Klašnja et al. 2020; Mutz 2011). We specifically leverage a conjoint vignette embedded within the LAPOP AmericasBarometer 2016/17 survey in Uruguay, Argentina and Chile. This design enables credible causal inferences of the impact of hypothetical candidate sex. Conjoint designs also help diminish social desirability effects, a prominent concern in gender research (Streb et al., 2008). The design completely randomized across candidate attributes (sex, party, incumbency and past corruption performance), the state of the economy, and the source of the information concerning corruption performance, thereby permitting simultaneous estimation of all these independent variables on vote choice.[7]

LAPOP conducts its surveys through face-to-face, rigorously supervised interviews of more than 1500 respondents per country. LAPOP's data-gathering method yields some of the highest-quality, nationally representative data of the voting age population available today. Thus, by design, our causal inferences generalize to the three target populations of Uruguay, Argentina and Chile.

Research on the effect of priming and framing (Chong and Druckman 2007; Goldin and Reck 2019; Garbarski et al., 2016) suggests that a sequence of survey questions can usefully serve to prime respondents, enhancing internal validity. Thus, an additional advantage of the LAPOP data is that the survey's question order encourages respondents to contemplate real-life corruption before listening to the hypothetical vignette. Respondents first were asked whether they had contact with a local institution, and if so, whether they had to pay a bribe in order to receive the service. Questions regarding their opinions on the state of affairs, and whether they thought bribing is ever justified, followed.

The LAPOP vignette invites participates to imagine a race where an incumbent mayor was competing against a challenger who had served as mayor in the past. This hypothetical set-up is predicated on the existence of local level corruption: voters receive information concerning whether the candidate is accused of corruption or the candidate sought to fight wrongdoing among public servants. The vignette does not specify the magnitude of corruption, and thus the hypothetical situation is realistic even in low-corruption countries such as Uruguay.

Respondents first were told "the municipality's economic conditions have [improved/worsened] since the last election." They then learned

that "[María/Alberto] López is the incumbent [<right party>/<left party>/independent] mayor running for reelection."[8] Respondents finally received information about candidates' past performance on the issue of corruption. Here, the experiment measures voter preferences only for candidates who are either running for immediate re-election or for a non-consecutive re-election, excluding the possibility of newcomer candidates. This focus on candidates with mayoral experience enables robust testing of the extent to which voters punish candidates for poor past performance on corruption and, conversely, the degree to which they reward candidates for strong performance.[9] It also means that, by vignette design, the results may not generalize to female or male candidates with no political experience.

Voters were randomly assigned four conditions concerning the candidates' past performance on corruption. Three of these conditions posited past bad performance in terms of allegations against the candidate, and one condition posited good past performance in terms of praise for fighting corruption at the municipal level. Candidates in the first condition were accused of accepting bribes in exchange for public concession during his/her term. Unlike the other poor performance conditions, voters were not offered a justification for the alleged corruption. We test $H_{corrupt}$ by analyzing the differences between female and male candidates in this first condition.

The next two conditions included a justification for candidates' alleged corruption. First, voters were told that the candidate's corruption is thought to have brought jobs to the municipality, providing a side-benefits motivation for the malfeasance. We test $H_{corruptsidebenefits}$ by analyzing the impact of candidate sex in this condition of corruption justified by job creation. Voters in the third condition learn that not only the candidate was accused of corruption, but also that corruption in the municipality was widespread at the time. The notion of widespread corruption thereby provides an alternative pretext for the candidates' wrongdoing. We test $H_{corruptwidespread}$ by analyzing the differences between female and male candidates in the third poor performance condition.

The fourth condition posits strong past performance on the issue of corruption at the municipal level: voters are told the candidate is praised for her/his efforts to punish civil servants for wrongdoing. We test $H_{fightcorruption}$ by analyzing the differences between female and male candidates in this final condition.

Based on potential outcomes framework of causal inference, we follow Hainmueller et al. (2014),[10] estimation strategy. The average marginal component effect (AMCE), a typical quantity of interest in conjoint analyses, summarizes the overall effect of one attribute across all other attributes. AMCE more precisely constitutes the marginal effect of one level of the attribute relative to a baseline condition averaged over the joint distribution of the other attributes, thereby representing the effect of such a change on candidates' expected vote shares (Bansak et al., 2020).

We can test our gender and corruption voting hypotheses by

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[7] Most conjoint experiments require participants to choose between two candidates several times, but LAPOP participants in this experiment only chose between candidates one time, a difference that limits our studies' number of observations when compared to the number of observations typical of conjoint experiments. We discuss the consequences of this later on.

[8] The vignette continues then by identifying the source of the information about the candidates' past performance on corruption: a left newspaper, a right newspaper or judicial officials. Given our theoretical focus, we do not analyze these results, provided in the online appendix.

[9] Existing theories suggest that voters may prefer female candidates in contexts of corruption because they associate them with outsider status and political inexperience. However, as the experiment was originally created to test corruption voting, it only features hypothetical candidates who had experience in office, thereby potentially limiting candidate sex stereotypes concerning women's outsider status. As a result, this aspect of our study could dilute the effect of candidate sex vis-à-vis other conjoint experimental design which include profiles who are true newcomers, that is, without any experience in political office.

[10] Following Hainmueller, Yamamoto and Hopkins (2014), the AMCE provides summary measures of average causal effects of one attribute on the candidate's expected vote share.

Box 1
Full Text of Conjoint Vignette

Imagine that you are voting in an election for mayor with two candidates. The economic conditions of the municipality have [improved/worsened] since the last election.

[María/Alberto] López is the incumbent [<right party>/<left party>/independent] mayor running for reelection. [The newspaper < left newspaper>/The newspaper < right newspaper>/Judicial officials] accused López of accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions during [her/his] term/accused López of accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions during [her/his] term, but some suggest that this practice brought construction jobs to the municipality]/accused López of accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions during [her/his] term, a practice that was then common throughout the province/[praised López's efforts to punish public employees accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions].

The other candidate is [Isabel/Juan] Arias from [<right party>/<left party>/independent]. Arias had been the mayor of the municipality before López took office. [The newspaper < left newspaper>/The newspaper < right newspaper>/Judicial officials] [praised Arias's efforts to punish public employees accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions/accused Arias of accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions during [her/his] term/accused Arias of accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions during [her/his/term, a practice that was then

common throughout the province/accused Arias of accepting bribes in exchange for public concessions during [her/his] term, but some suggest that this practice brought construction jobs to the municipality].

Note: The Chilean vignette uses the last name of Soto instead of Arias, as the former is more common in Chile.

Source: Klašnja, Lupu and Tucker (2017: 10–11), with modifications to the displayed order of the randomized corruption conditions.

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examining the causal effect of candidate's sex conditional on corruption performance. We thus estimate the conditional AMCE which summarizes the effect of one attribute conditional on the value of a different attribute over all the other attributes. The quantity thus enables analysis of whether the causal marginal effect of candidates' sex differs according to past corruption performance, and if applicable, justifications for poor performance. In the absence of causal interaction effects, the conditional effects should remain similar across conditioning variables.

5. Findings

Before evaluating our hypotheses, we first analyze the average marginal component effects (AMCE) of all attributes included in vignette—except "information source"— in order to contextualize our findings concerning the significance and magnitude of candidate sex on vote choice.[11] These results enable us to compare the AMCEs of candidate sex (coded 0 for male and 1 for female) relative to other variables. Because gender stereotypes are cultural constructions, we maintain that the effects of candidate sex can vary geographically. Fig. 1, in turn, displays the average marginal component effects by country, along with the magnitude and significance of inter-country differences.

Candidate sex exerts a positive and significant impact only among Uruguayan voters: the variable is not significant among Argentines or Chileans. Being a female rather than a male candidate increases the expected vote share by 5% among Uruguayans. Comparing between countries, the Uruguayan and Chilean results are significantly different at the 95% confidence level, but the difference of the impact of candidate sex between Uruguay and Argentina is not significant.

Moving down Fig. 1, we can compare how voters punish hypothetical candidates according to the differing justifications for the corruption. The reference category here is strong corruption performance, and so the results show that voters in all countries punish candidates for poor corruption performance. Uruguayan voters seem to do so to the greatest extent. The probability of voting for a candidate accused of taking a bribe decreases by 42% among Uruguayans, 34% among Argentines,

and 30% among Chileans compared to the baseline condition, strong corruption performance. Moreover, the country-level differences between Uruguay and Argentina and Uruguay and Chile are statistically significant.

Turning to the second poor corruption performance condition, the probability of voting for a candidate accused of taking a bribe when the act is thought to bring employment side benefits decreases by 35% among Uruguayans, 24% among Argentines, and 20% among Chileans. Here, the differences between Uruguay and Argentina and between Uruguay and Chile are statistically significant, but the results from Argentina and Chile are statistically indistinguishable.

Regarding the third poor corruption performance condition, the probability of voting for a candidate accused of taking a bribe when corruption is widespread decreases by 39% among Uruguayans, 38% among Argentines, and 31% among Chileans compared to the baseline condition. Here, Chileans again seem to punish corrupt candidates the least, and the differences between Chile vs. Uruguay and Chile vs. Argentina are statistically significant. However, the results from Uruguay and Argentina are statistically indistinguishable.

To sum up so far, Uruguayans—but not Argentines nor Chileans—prefer female candidates overall, and some measures indicate that Uruguayans punish corrupt hypothetical candidates more in terms of magnitude than their Argentine and Chilean counterparts. Chileans indeed punish corrupt candidates, but they do so to a lesser extent overall.

Accountability theory posits the state of the economy to affect vote shares only for the sitting incumbent running for a consecutive re-election. Improvements in the economy boosted the probability of voting for these incumbents by 8% among Uruguayans, 6% among Argentines, and 6% among Chileans. None of the differences in these country-level results are significant, suggesting that citizens from all three countries react similarly to variations in economic conditions.

The vignette further revealed the candidates' party or coalition. The Uruguayan vignette referred to the Frente Amplio and the Partido Nacional; the Argentine vignette mentioned the Frente para la Victoria (Justicialismo Kirchnerista) and the Partido Justicialista; and the Chilean vignette referred to the coalitions of the Nueva Mayoría and Chile Vamos. We constructed a co-partisan variable by matching respondents' own party identification, measured several questions prior to vignette, with hypothetical candidates' parties. In case of Chile, we consider a candidate as a co-partisan if the respondent identifies with any of the

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[11] See Appendix for results of "information source." Results for randomization checks, which reveal no statistically significant associations between respondents' characteristics and the randomized treatments, are shown in Klašnja et al. (2020).
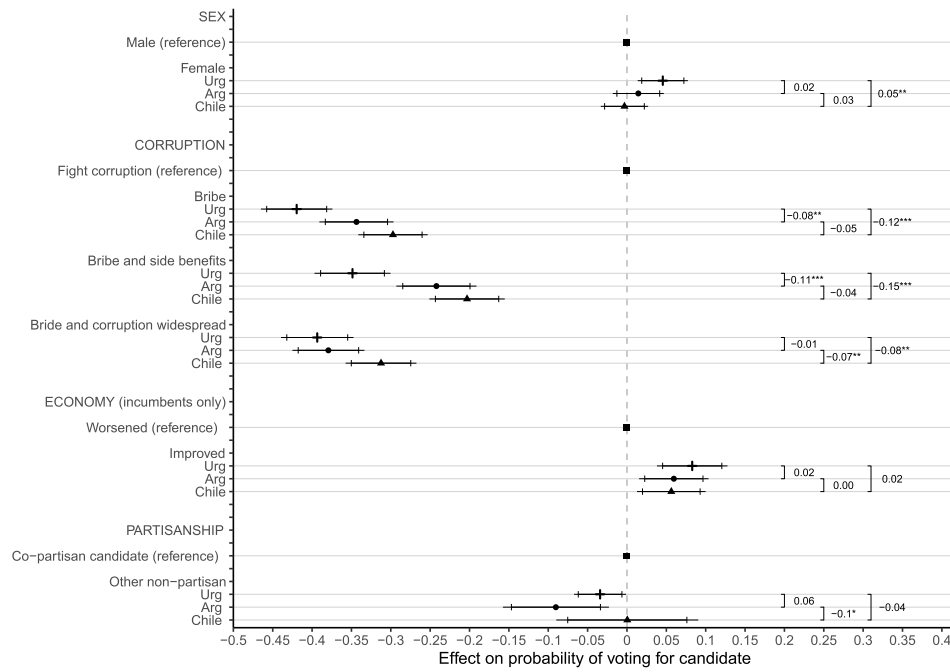
Fig. 1. Average Marginal Component Effects by Country. Note: Lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals estimated with standard errors clustered by respondent. Brackets indicate inter-country differences in terms of magnitude and significance:***p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.01.

coalition parties. The reference category features non-partisans, which includes those who identify with an opposition party, independents and instances when the candidate was identified as an independent. Compared to a co-partisan, the expected vote share of a non-co-partisan decreases by 3% among Uruguayans, 9% among Argentinians and has no effect among Chileans. Only the difference between Argentinians and Chileans is statistically significant at the 90% confidence level, suggesting that the former rely on partisanship as a voting cue to a greater degree than the latter.

Do voters punish female and male candidates differently according to justifications for candidates' alleged corruption? Our theory of gender and corruption voting argues that voters may punish allegedly corrupt female candidates less than male candidates. However, the impact of candidate sex on voter preferences may depend on the kind of stated justification, and it may vary by country. Fig. 2 provides results to test our hypotheses by displaying the AMCEs of candidate sex for each of the
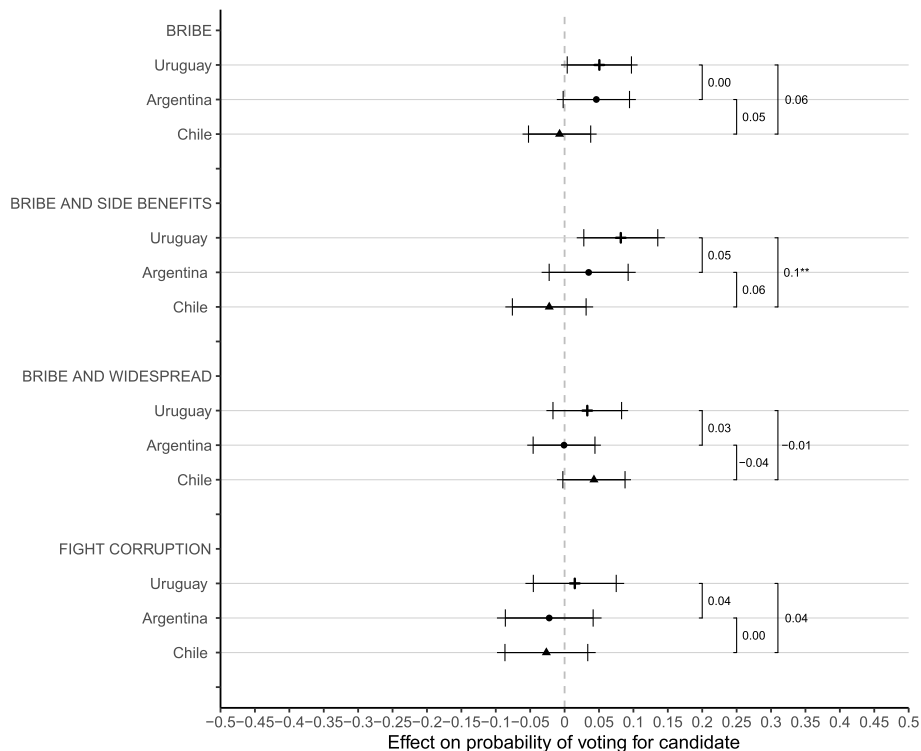
Fig. 2. Conditional AMCEs of Candidate Sex by Country. Note: Lines represent 90% and 95% confidence intervals estimated using standard errors clustered by respondent. Brackets show the difference between countries. *p < 0.1, **p < 0.05, ***p < 0.01.

four conditions concerning past performance on corruption by country: (1) accusations of taking a bribe with unspecified justifications; (2) accusations justified by job creation; (3) accusations justified by widespread corruption; (4) praise for punishing civil servants for wrongdoing.

We consider statistical significance as reaching the 90% confidence level since we have less statistical power in testing our gender and corruption voting hypothesis than the vast majority of conjoint experiments. The empirical strategy proposed by Hainmueller et al. (2014) under completely independent randomization is the difference-in-means estimator which is equivalent to fitting a simple linear regression. The number of cases used to estimate each mean for the conditional AMCE reduces to about a quarter of the number of cases when we only analyzed the effect of candidate's sex.

We start by analyzing the results of the first condition: hypothetical candidates were accused of corruption, and voters were not given a specific justification for the alleged wrongdoing. The first condition posited poor corruption performance among candidates, testing our first hypothesis, $H_{corrupt}$. The results show that the impact of candidate sex increases the probability of Uruguayans voting for the accused candidate by 5%, which is consistent with $H_{corrupt}$. However, this is the only result that reaches statistical significance, and only at 90 confidence level. Candidates' sex is not significant among Argentine or Chilean voters, and hence do not provide evidence in favor of $H_{corrupt}$. None of the country-level differences were statistically significant, although the effect among Chileans is virtually zero, compared to the 5% effect among Uruguayans.[12]

Moving down Fig. 2, we can see the results of the impact of candidate sex among candidates of the second condition, that is, candidates accused of corruption that was justified by side benefits in the form of job creation. Candidate sex here does not significantly affect vote choice among Argentines or Chileans but does among Uruguayans. Therefore, only the Uruguayan data support $H_{corruptsidebenefits}$. Furthermore, the effect among Uruguayans is statistically different than among Chileans at the 95% level.

Our next two hypotheses posited null effects for the impact of candidate sex. Our theory argues that voters will not prefer corrupt female candidates when told that corruption is widespread. This notion contradicts pro-female stereotypes of women in politics, casting doubt on the idea that female politicians are inherently more honest and/or have reduced access to corruption networks. $H_{corruptwidespread}$ posited null effects here, and consistent with that null hypothesis, none of the effects reach statistical significance, nor any of the differences in the effects between countries.

Our theory finally argued that because fighting corruption implies both stereotypically feminine (probity) and masculine traits (toughness), candidate sex should not causally impact vote choice among candidates in the fourth condition. Here again $H_{fightcorruption}$ posited null effects, and none of the results reach statistically significance in these countries.

Our theory does not articulate expectations in the impact of candidate sex on vote choice according to respondent sex, but here we fully leverage this study's design by analyzing inter-country differences according to respondent sex.[13] We find additional evidence in favor of our hypotheses. First, the impact of candidate sex among corrupt candidates with no justification for wrongdoing is significant and positive at the 95% level, providing additional evidence for $H_{corrupt}$. Among Argentinian and Chilean women, however, the impact of candidate sex remains

insignificant. Moreover, the differences between Uruguayan and Argentinian women and Uruguayan and Chilean women attain significance at the 90% level.

Results for the second condition—where allegedly corrupt candidates' bribes presumably enhanced local employment—again reveal some evidence for $H_{corruptsidebenefits}$. The impact of candidate sex again is positive and significant among Uruguayan women, but not among Argentinian and Chilean women. None of the inter-country differences among women respondents reach significance. Finally, and as expected by $H_{corruptwidespread}$ and $H_{fightcorruption}$, results among women voters are all null, and none of the inter-country differences reach statistical significance.

We close our interpretation of results by examining the sub-group of men by country. Starting with candidates accused of bribes with no stated justification, the impact of candidate sex among Argentinian men is significant and positive at the 95% level, providing additional, albeit sex-specific, evidence for $H_{corrupt}$. Among Uruguayan and Chilean men, however, the impact of candidate sex in this first condition appears null. The differences between Argentinian and Chilean men are significant at the 90% confidence level, but other inter-country differences are not significant.

Regarding corrupt candidates whose misdeeds brought employment, evidence for $H_{corruptsidebenefits}$ among male respondents is decidedly mixed. The impact of candidate sex varies by country: it fails to reach significant among Uruguayan men, but it is positive and significant among Argentinian men at the 10% level. However, Chilean men punish female candidates in the second condition. Put differently, the probability of voting for a male accused of corruption, which presumably enhanced local employment, over a similarly-described female candidate increased by 11% among Chilean men. The differences between Argentinian and Chilean men and between Uruguayan and Chilean men are significant at the 95% confidence level, but other inter-country differences are not significant. Finally, $H_{corruptwidespread}$ and $H_{fightcorruption}$ anticipate null results for the third and fourth conditions, and results among men voters—similarly among women voters—are all null. None of these inter-country differences reach statistical significance.

6. Discussion

Uruguay, Argentina and Chile represent theoretically relevant cases to test our gender and corruption voting hypotheses in part because they vary in terms of their overall levels of corruption and the presence of women in national-level, although not municipal-level, politics. Our research design cannot identify a single explanation of these cross-national differences, an area of future investigation.[14] Yet, our theoretical framework nevertheless suggests that some of these inter-country

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[12] Existing literature suggests any causal effects of candidate sex remain small in magnitude, and thus the null results could be due to lack of power derived from the reduced sample used to estimate it. However, only additional experiments studies with larger sample sizes could ascertain this.

[13] Results disaggregated by respondent's sex are available in the online appendix A.

[14] We exploited other aspects of the nationally representative LAPOP data to explore whether respondents' *a priori* beliefs about politicians and corruption could play a role. Our theory suggests citizens who perceive real-life corruption as endemic may be less influenced by candidate sex because they may believe female and male politicians perform similarly on the issue of corruption. The positive effects of candidate sex observed in Uruguay, but not in Argentina and Chile could be due to a variable proportion of citizens who believe that "all politicians are corrupt?" To probe this possibility, we disaggregated our results both by country and whether respondents believe that "not all politicians are corrupt." These results replicate the ones obtained for the whole sample in all countries. Indeed, we found that within the group of Uruguayan voters who believe that not all politicians are corrupt, female candidates' AMCE is statistically different from zero at the 5% level both conditional on bribes and bribes and side benefits, consistent with the results from the whole sample. As in the whole sample, we do not find statistically significant effects among Argentinians and Chileans. This could suggest that, consistent with much of our theoretical discussion, country-level differences might emerge as more relevant than differences between subgroup's perceptions of corruption in politics. (Full results are available in the online appendix B.)

differences could relate to countries' histories of corruption scandals involving women in political office. Future research could explore whether positive effects detected in Uruguay and the null effects observed in Argentina and Chile relate to these countries' variable experiences with high-profile corruption scandals involving female politicians prior to or during the survey's fieldwork.

None of the female politicians who attract the most national attention in Uruguay have been implicated in prominent corruption cases. Former mayor of Montevideo Ana Olivera, vice president, former first lady and vice president Lucía Topolansky, and senator Constanza Moreira all enjoy squeaky-clean records.[15]

However, several female leaders in Argentina faced ongoing allegations during the period of LAPOP's 2016-17 survey fieldwork: March-May 2017. Former President Cristina Fernández has been implicated in corruption allegations for years (Manzetti 2014). Economy Minister Felisa Miceli was found with a bag of cash in the bathroom of her office in 2007, which led to her stepping down just as Fernández herself geared up to run for president. Leading the opposition to Fernández's administration, Mauricio Macri succeeded her in 2015, and his Vice President Gabriela Michetti, was accused of diverting money for foundations in August 2016 ("Top Macri Officials Under Investigation for Corruption" 2016). Indigenous social movement leader, Milagro Sala, was detained in 2016 and is also investigated for crimes of fraud and extortion. Thus, Argentinians historically and recently have been exposed to reports of multiple high-profile female leaders implicated in corruption prior to or during the 2017 LAPOP survey fieldwork.

Our results nevertheless suggested that the strongest country-level differences appeared between Uruguay and Chile, rather than Uruguay and Argentina. National scandals in recent years, notably the 2015 *Pentagate,* have implicated mostly male politicians in Chile (Balán 2011; Bonnefoy 2015). One political earthquake, a scandal implicating President Michelle Bachelet's son, erupted about a year prior to this study's fieldwork. Extensive media coverage, gendered attacks from the opposition, and Bachelet's own mishandling of the scandal seemed to disillusion many Chileans who came to believe that Bachelet herself was dishonest. The fallout of the Bachelet scandal seemed to directly contradict the notion that Bachelet, particularly as a female president and mother, possessed greater moral integrity than her male counterparts (Reyes-Housholder, 2020). Follow-up studies can systematically theorize and test the country-level conditions under which women do and do not enjoy electoral benefits.

7. Conclusions

Our theory of gender and corruption voting has argued that due to both essentialist and structuralist logics, voters likely prefer allegedly corrupt female candidates over their equally accused male counterparts. Our theory further explains how and why these pro-female biases vary according to the justification for the corruption: when voters are told that corruption is widespread, they demonstrate indifference to candidates' sex. Moreover, candidate sex does not affect voter preferences when the candidates have fought corruption. Our theory thereby brings together two previously disconnected literatures—scholarship on the causal impact of candidate sex and scholarship on corruption voting—providing fresh insights on the relationship between candidate sex and justifications for political malfeasance.

Our results from show that voters in Uruguay—but not in Argentina or Chile—punish corrupt female candidates less, but not when they learn the corruption is widespread. Voters in none of these countries preferred female or male candidates when candidates were praised for their corruption-fighting efforts. This paper, to our knowledge, is the

first to credibly demonstrate that the causal impact of candidate sex on vote choice varies across countries. Our study serves as a reminder of the external validity limitations inherent to experiments conducted in a single country, and we call for more research on the country-level factors that could determine variations in voter preferences for female or male candidates.

Our null findings also contribute to existing knowledge of the impact of candidate sex on voter preferences. With the exception of the sub-group of Chilean men choosing among corrupt female and male candidates who brought side-benefits, we find no evidence in any of these countries of an *a priori* pro-male bias among voters. This helps confirm a growing scholarly consensus that citizens' baseline preferences—measured via carefully crafted survey experiments—hardly explain women's underrepresentation in political office (Aguilar et al. 2015; Teele et al. 2018; Schwarz et al. 2018; Kage et al. 2019). Our lack of evidence concerning a pro-male bias may still appear somewhat controversial as other experimental studies conducted in other parts of the world continue to find that female and male candidates are held to different standards (Bauer 2020).

Our theory applies to voters' preferences independent of other real-world factors such as sexist media coverage and the opposition's discourse, which undoubtedly also shape vote preferences in real-life settings. We hesitate to extrapolate our results to women's real-life electoral prospects since much research suggests that these factors indeed could drive different standards for female and male politicians. In particular, observational research from Latin America shows that citizens punish sitting female presidents more than male presidents for corruption scandals implicating their presidencies, perceptions of corruption at the executive level, and perceptions of public corruption (Carlin et al. 2019; Reyes-Housholder, 2020). The observational nature of these studies' data imposes limitation to credible causal inferences, but this recent work uniquely contributes by theorizing how the opposition's discourse and media coverage can distort and exaggerate scandal allegations (Reyes-Housholder, 2020). Again, our study abstracts from media treatments of corruption accusations against male and female politicians and instead strives to identify causality as well as external validity via nationally representative sampling. We maintain that understanding women's political underrepresentation indeed requires understand voters' baseline preferences. This article, grounded in population-based experimental data from multiple countries, therefore complements rather than challenges existing observational studies.

The normative implications of this study may be complex, however, as this article also speaks to scholarship concerned with accountability failures vis-a-vis corrupt incumbents. The Uruguayan findings showing that female candidates might be punished less could worry accountability scholars, but at the same time, Uruguayans were also the citizens who punished corrupt candidates the most overall. Our findings that voters sometimes punish corrupt females less should not be interpreted as suggesting that candidate sex constitutes yet another mitigation factor working against accountability: voter preferences for corrupt female candidates may interact with corruption justifications in country-specific ways.

Data availability

We use data that are already publicly available via LAPOP.

Acknowledgement

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[15] Raúl Sendic resigned from the vice-presidency upon charges that he had misused a corporate credit card in September 2017, several months after this study's fieldwork in Uruguay.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2020.102270.