

Time in Office and the Changing Gender Gap in Dishonesty: Evidence from Local Politics in India



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Abstract: *Increasing the share of women in politics is often promoted as a means to reduce corruption. Recent studies indicate the importance of considering the gender gap in corruption as a dynamic, rather than static, phenomenon. Our study combines data from surveys and incentivized behavioral games among 400 inexperienced and experienced local politicians in West Bengal, India. We find no gender gap in attitudes toward corruption. However, in incentivized games, inexperienced female politicians are more honest than their male counterparts. No such gender gap exists among experienced politicians. Drawing on a theoretical discussion of four possible mechanisms, we find that the apparent increase in dishonest behavior among female politicians is associated with lower risk aversion and stronger political networks. Our findings indicate that women, like men, are socialized into their local political culture and that benefits from changing who is elected may be short-lived unless that culture is also changed.*

Verification Materials: The data and materials required to verify the computational reproducibility of the results, procedures, and analyses in this article are available on the *American Journal of Political Science* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/HX6YRD>.

A central argument for increasing the share of women in politics is that it improves governance and reduces corruption. Research indicates that women are more trustworthy (Barnes and Beaulieu 2019; Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti 2001; Schneider and Bos 2014), are more averse to risk taking (Croson and Gneezy 2009; Eckel and Grossman 2002; Fletschner, Anderson, and Cullen 2010), and lack the political networks necessary

for engaging in malfeasance (Bjarnegård 2013; Goetz 2007; O'Brien 2015). Cross-country and cross-regional evidence indicates that having a higher share of women in parliament or in the state bureaucracy is associated with lower corruption (Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti 2001; Grimes and Wängnerud 2010). Studies using individual-level data have also found women to be more honest and less tolerant of corruption (Friesen and Gangadharan

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2012). In India, Baskaran et al. (2018) found that the annual rate of asset accumulation among female members of state legislative assemblies was 10 percentage points lower than for men; Beaman et al. (2009) report that residents are less likely to pay bribes if the village headship is reserved for women. Brollo and Troiano (2016) report that female mayors in Brazil are less likely to be involved in administrative irregularities. Bauhr and Charron (2021) find less corruption in French municipalities with female mayors. Other studies, however, report no gender differences in the propensity to be corrupt or dishonest (Debski et al. 2018; Sung 2003; Vijayalakshmi 2008). An important question, then, is why and under what circumstances does increasing women's representation reduce corruption? Some researchers have examined how context or system determine the effects of women's representation, and they find a more pronounced gender gap in dishonesty in democracies with high electoral accountability (Alatas et al. 2009; Esarey and Schwindt-Bayer 2018). Grimes and Wängnerud (2018) and Sung (2003) indicate that including more women in politics is neither a necessary nor sufficient condition for reducing corruption: To have an impact, women's inclusion must coincide with other anti-corruption efforts.

An emerging body of work shows how *time in office* changes politicians' propensity toward corrupt behavior (Bauhr and Charron 2021; Enemark et al. 2016; Jha and Sarangi 2019), indicating the need to theorize and study the gender gap in corruption as dynamic rather than static. Bauhr and Charron (2021) find that their reported gender gap in corruption in French municipalities is entirely driven by newly elected mayors.¹ They interpret this as evidence for marginalization theories of the gender gap—that women are less corrupt because they are less embedded in networks that facilitate corruption. Bauhr and Charron consider other possible explanations for the gender gap, such as women's stronger pro-sociality and higher risk aversion to be less amenable to change. We build on this work but argue that pro-sociality and risk aversion may also change as new political entrants gain office-holding experience. Further, we examine the role of short time horizons—an important predictor of corruption and poor performance by elected representatives in the political economy literature (see Ferraz and Finan 2011).² Our expectation is then that,

in gender-unequal contexts where corruption is prevalent, inexperienced women should have a lower propensity toward corrupt behavior than men, but that this gap weakens over time as women become socialized into the local political culture.

Empirical study of dishonesty and corrupt behavior among politicians is challenging, both because survey responses often suffer from self-reporting and social desirability biases, and because elected politicians represent a busy, hard-to-recruit and not readily accessible pool of experimental participants. Accordingly, empirical attempts to capture the intentions and behavior of politicians often rely on proxies and indirect measures of politician performance, such as the administrative efficiency in program delivery in their constituency or indicators of corruption at more aggregate levels. In contrast, experimental studies of individual-level behavior typically use samples of citizens—often university students—from industrialized countries. This limits the scope for generalizing findings to elected politicians, as the observable and unobservable characteristics, attitudes, and behavior of politicians within the country of study are likely to differ from those of the general citizenry (Butler and Kousser 2015; Dal Bó et al. 2017).³

For this study, we collected comprehensive survey and experimental data for a sample of 400 male and female local politicians in West Bengal, India. To compare inexperienced and experienced politicians who were as similar as possible, we sampled both incoming and outgoing politicians in the same localities immediately after the 2018 local elections. We compare the 191 incoming politicians with no prior political experience (“inexperienced”) with the 192 outgoing and reelected politicians who had entered office without prior experience in 2013 (“experienced”).⁴ This allows us to examine the propensity toward corrupt behavior among similar groups of inexperienced and experienced male and female politicians.

We use two approaches for measuring the propensity toward corrupt behavior. First, to uncover *attitudes* toward corruption, we employ vignettes and survey questions. In these self-reported data, we find no significant gender gap among inexperienced or experienced politicians. Second, politicians participate in a die-tossing task: a standard *behavioral* measure of dishonesty that

¹Similarly, Afridi, Iversen, and Sharan (2017) find more administrative lapses and program leakages in villages with women village council heads compared to councils with men in power, but only during their first year in office.

²We do not consider these different mechanisms mutually exclusive.

³However, a meta-analysis of paired citizen–elite experiments by Kertzer (2020) indicates that the differences between these groups may be exaggerated.

⁴As a robustness check, we also ran all analyses including the 17 politicians who reported having more than 5 years of experience in office (online supporting information [SI], pp. 12–15).

captures willingness to cheat for personal gain (see Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi 2013). Participants throw an unbiased die 30 times in private, with payment received according to the number of sixes they report. As there is no monitoring of the actual number of sixes obtained, it is impossible to know for sure whether an individual has reported truthfully. However, we can use the deviation of the reported number of sixes from the expected number of sixes in 30 throws of an unbiased die as a group-level measure of (dis)honesty.⁵ Among inexperienced politicians, women report significantly fewer sixes than men in the die-tossing task; among experienced politicians, the gender gap disappears. We find a large, statistically significant difference between inexperienced and experienced female politicians, but not between inexperienced and experienced male politicians.

Drawing on our theoretical discussion, we then test four possible mechanisms that may explain this changing gender gap in dishonesty: differences in pro-sociality, risk aversion, access to political networks, and time horizons. To elicit pro-sociality, we use the behavior of participants in a dictator game and a trust game; to measure risk aversion, an investment game; to capture access to political networks, political family connections and whether politicians receive help with their political duties and responsibilities; and to capture time horizons, we leverage the quota system and expressed political aspirations. We find no indications that the initial or changing gender gap is a result of female politicians being more or becoming less pro-social, or that differences between men and women are driven by time horizons. We do, however, find evidence in support of both the risk aversion mechanism and the network mechanism.

Our findings make several contributions to the literature. To the best of our knowledge, our study is the first to present both self-reported attitudes and experimental results on dishonest behavior among a large sample of elected politicians. The discrepancy in our findings between attitudes and behavior echoes other work that compares survey and experimental data, and it should warn against reading too much into self-reported survey data on sensitive topics such as corruption (see Chaudhuri 2012). Further, by comparing a similar set of inexperienced and experienced politicians, we present evidence showing how the behavior of male and female politicians

may change with time in office.⁶ That behavior differs after a single term in office provides valuable insights about the pace of behavioral change. Finally, by theorizing and testing four mechanisms to explain the narrowing gender gap in dishonesty with time in office, we contribute new insights into the underpinnings of the convergence observed. Our results indicate that women, like men, are socialized into the local political culture, and that any honesty and corruption dividends from changing who gets elected may prove short-lived unless one simultaneously manages to change this political culture.

A Dynamic Gender Gap in Dishonest Behavior

Following the publication of Dollar, Fisman, and Gatti's (2001) and Swamy and colleagues' (2001) cross-country analyses indicating that having more women in parliament and other leadership positions reduces corruption, an emphasis on the instrumental value of women in positions of power has spread widely. Reiterated in World Bank reports (e.g., World Bank 2002) and global policy debates, governments responded swiftly to the suggestion that women could help clean up politics. In 2003, for example, Mexico's customs service announced that its new anti-corruption force would be entirely female; in Uganda, the vast majority of positions as local government treasurers are assigned to women. Women are increasingly viewed as "political cleaners" (Goetz 2007).

Why should we expect a gender gap in corrupt or dishonest behavior among new entrants into politics? A first explanation in the literature—the *pro-social mechanism*—is that women simply tend to be more honest and altruistic than men. Many observational and experimental studies support this conjecture. Evidence from dictator games suggests that women are more generous (Eckel and Grossman 1998); trust games show that men are generally more trusting and women more trustworthy (see Rau 2012). Using data from experiments conducted in Sweden, Dreber and Johannesson (2008) find that women are less likely than men to lie in order to obtain a higher payoff. D'Attoma, Volintiru, and Steinmo (2017) show women to be more tax-compliant than men

⁵Although we do not equate corruption with dishonest behavior, a large and credible body of evidence indicates that behavior in this task is associated with the *propensity* to engage in dishonest and corrupt behavior outside an experimental setting. See "Results from the Die-Tossing Task" in the Results section for further discussion.

⁶The fact that our study is observational in nature means that we cannot rule out that the patterns we observe are driven by unobservable differences between the groups under comparison. However, finding similar attitudes and behavior among inexperienced and experienced *men* somewhat alleviates concerns about major shifts in the type of politicians elected in 2013 and in 2018.

in every country and under every condition studied. Similarly, a meta-analysis of 63 experimental studies finds that women appear more likely to tell the truth (Rosenbaum, Billinger, and Stieglitz 2014). In a comprehensive review of experimental evidence on gender differences in corruption, Chaudhuri (2012) concludes that either women behave more honestly than men, or there are no significant gender differences—the same might hold true for female politicians.

A second explanation, suggested by Swamy et al. (2001) and in multiple other studies, is that female politicians engage less in corruption because they are more risk-averse than their male colleagues. We refer to this as the *risk aversion mechanism*. Outside of politics, there is ample evidence of women being more risk-averse than men. Data from the United States show that as wealth increases, the proportion of wealth held as risky assets is higher among men than among women (Jianakoplos and Bernasek 1998). In behavioral tasks with gambling options, men are more likely to choose risky bets (Levin, Snyder, and Chapman 1988). In their review of gender differences in economic experiments, Croson and Gneezy (2009) conclude that there are robust differences in male and female risk preferences. A gender gap in risk aversion has also been reported in studies of voters' decisions, especially in high-stakes political decisions (Verge, Guinjoan, and Rodon 2015). Applying these insights to the context of corruption, Schulze and Frank (2003) show that whereas women are as willing as men to accept bribes in a no-risk situation, they are less willing to do so in higher-risk situations.⁷

A third explanation for why women may engage less in corruption than men holds that they have less opportunity to do so because of their weaker political networks (Bjarnegård 2013; Goetz 2007; Heath, Schwindt-Bayer, and Taylor-Robinson 2005; O'Brien 2015). The context we study, India, is known to be a patronage democracy where much delivery of services, and probably also much corrupt behavior, is clientelistic in nature, involving networks of brokers and activists (Bussell 2019; Chandra 2004). Female politicians have been found to be less effective than men in navigating such patronage systems (Bardhan, Mookherjee, and Torrado 2005).⁸

The empirical expectation from each of these theoretical explanations is that female politicians are less

likely than men to engage in corrupt or dishonest behavior—at least at the time of their entering office. However, none of these three explanations necessitate a static gender gap in attitudes or behavior. To the extent that gender differences result from socialization and experience rather than from inherent differences between men and women, it is reasonable to expect participation in politics to resocialize politicians. As noted, studies increasingly point to the need to theorize the gender gap in dishonesty and corrupt behavior as dynamic rather than static. Starting with the third explanation, the *network mechanism* is clearly dynamic and can help explain both an initial gender gap and change over time. Studies show that people may be averse to working with female leaders, particularly in their first term in office (Gangadharan et al. 2016), but gradually grow more accustomed to women leaders (Beaman et al. 2009; Gangadharan et al. 2016). Other work shows that women rapidly build political networks once they have the opportunity (Goyal 2020). Bauhr and Charron (2021) report that their finding of a gender gap and less corruption in French municipalities with women mayors is entirely driven by newcomers; in municipalities where women incumbents were reelected, gender differences are negligible. This they interpret as evidence of women as marginalized and excluded from political networks that may change with time in office, either because of selection of who survives in office or individual-level adaptation.

When it comes to explanations related to women's pro-sociality and risk aversion, Bauhr and Charron (2021) hold that we should expect the gender gap in corrupt behavior to be unrelated to seniority in office—indicating that these alternative explanations are more static. By contrast, we argue that these mechanisms should be recognized as dynamic. Newly elected politicians are likely to become socialized into the local version of the political game. As Grimes and Wängnerud note, “even if women were inclined toward more rule-bound behavior, they are certainly not impervious to social learning and adaptation; entry into and socialization into the political realm would require women to decipher and adapt to the practices in place” (2018, 207). Research from Zambia shows that holding office increases politicians' adherence to a reciprocity norm—indicating that with experience comes a greater likelihood of engaging in corrupt behavior (Enemark et al. 2016). In a study from Ghana, Alhassan-Alolo (2007) finds similar attitudes toward corruption among men and women, arguing that this is because they are exposed to a similar political environment. Studies of risk perception support this argument: Those who are more familiar with the risks they face are also less likely to perceive them as frightening

⁷This may also be linked to the fact that women seem to be punished more severely than men for any wrongdoing in office (e.g., see Eggers, Vivyan, and Wagner 2018; Kennedy, McDonnell, and Stephens 2016).

⁸Another central explanation in the literature, related to women's interests and policy agendas, is discussed in the section “External Validity and Generalizability.”

(Cutter, Tiefenbacher, and Solecki 1992). Risk attitudes are influenced by social learning and environmental conditions and can change rapidly—even within the span of weeks (Booth, Cardona-Sosa, and Nolen 2014). Thus, even seemingly inherent individual preferences are prone to change; and the more the political environment differs from the context in which politicians lived before entering politics, the more change we should expect to observe. This implies that changes in attitudes and behaviors with time in office may occur for both women and men, but we expect more of a change for women in gender-unequal contexts where politics is likely to be a less familiar arena for them.⁹

A final possible explanation for a gender gap in corrupt or dishonest behavior concerns differences in time horizons and career trajectories. This explanation—the *time horizon mechanism*—is derived from the political economy literature, which shows that politicians with shorter time horizons tend to be more opportunistic while in office, resulting in weaker performance and more corruption (e.g., see Alt, Bueno de Mesquita, and Rose 2011; Besley and Case 1995; Ferraz and Finan 2011). Politicians in India have similarly been found to allocate more resources to elites rather than to the poor if they are unlikely to be reelected (Genicot, Brown, and Kochhar 2021)—indicating clientelistic and corrupt behavior.

With regard to time horizons, gender gaps in dishonest behavior seem unlikely among newly elected local politicians in India: Women may generally have somewhat lower aspirations for a political career, but more women than men use local politics as a stepping-stone to a future political career (see Goyal 2020; Maitra and Rosenblum 2021; O’Connell 2018). Thus, it seems reasonable to expect men’s and women’s political aspirations and time horizons in politics to be similar upon entering office. However, women’s aspirations may weaken over time, as they face a more hostile environment in politics than men—they get less credit for the work they do and experience negative attention, sexual harassment, and sometimes violent backlash while in office (Brulé 2020; Jensenius 2019). If these negative experiences in politics lower women’s political aspirations or their belief in their chances of getting reelected, we might expect women to become more prone to corrupt behavior by limiting their political time horizon to the current term in office.

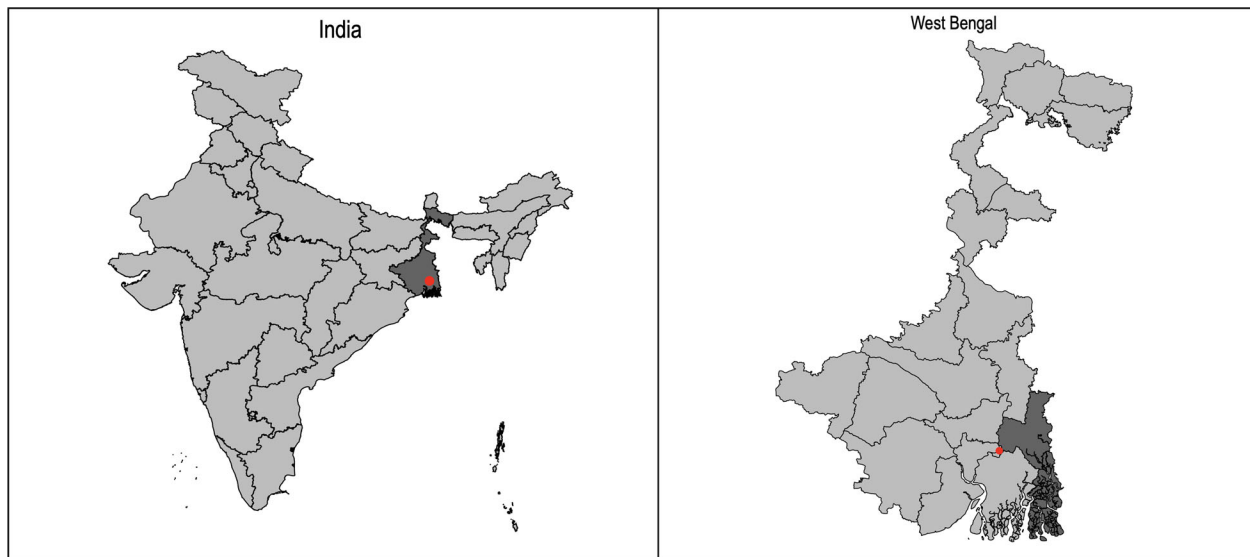
Context and Data

Our data are from West Bengal, a large state in Eastern India. In India, politicians are widely expected to engage in corrupt behavior, with media regularly reporting on scams and corruption scandals. According to Transparency International India’s Corruption Survey 2018, 56% of Indians reported paying bribes for services in the previous year. Studies of the sworn affidavits that politicians must submit before running for office show that members of legislative assemblies often accumulate sizable wealth during their time in office (Fisman, Schulz, and Vig 2014). Bribe paying may also be increasing (Borooah 2016). The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution, passed in 1992, established and codified a three-tier system of local governance (the *panchayat* system), comprising councils at the village, block (or sub-district), and district levels. The *panchayat* system was already well established in West Bengal when the *panchayat* reforms came into effect, but a novel and radical feature of the reforms was the mandated political reservations for minority groups and women.¹⁰ West Bengal first implemented the required one-third quota for women in 1993, increasing it to 50% from the 2013 elections onward.

The village council (or *gram panchayat*, henceforth GP) is the lowest tier of local government. The GP is responsible for allocating funds to administrative expenses (e.g., salaries), the provision and maintenance of local public goods (e.g., roads and irrigation canals, village-level sanitation services), and the delivery of important public programs. As GP councilors have considerable local power, corrupt or dishonest behavior can adversely affect the community. In West Bengal, each GP covers 5–15 villages, representing a total population of around 10,000 people. Candidates for a GP seat may be nominated by a political party or stand as independents. Either way, they must be a resident of the village they represent. West Bengal is characterized by intense political competition at every tier of government. From 1977 to 2011, the CPI(M)-led Left Front was in power at the state level, as well as being the dominant party in local-level elections. In 2011, the state legislative assembly elections brought massive political change, with the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) taking over as the ruling party. The TMC won large majorities at the GP level across the

⁹See the section “External Validity and Generalizability” on how this may play out in different contexts.

¹⁰The minority groups comprised the Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and (from 2013) Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The reserved seats are rotated every election (see Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004a, p. 981).

FIGURE 1 Location of Study

Notes: The left panel shows the location of West Bengal (darker shade). The right panel shows the location of North 24 Parganas (darker shade), where our study was conducted. The dot denotes the state capital, Kolkata.

state in the 2013 local elections and retained control of most village councils in the 2018 elections as well.

Study Design

As our goal is to capture a time-in-office effect, the ideal approach would have been to conduct a study with a sample of incoming politicians in 2013 and then compare them to themselves 5 years later—when some would be outgoing and some would have been reelected. Such a design is logistically challenging, and also problematic, because of the possible learning effect from taking part in our survey and games. Instead, we compare similar groups of inexperienced and experienced politicians immediately after the 2018 local elections. Our full sample consists of 239 incoming and 161 outgoing GP-level politicians across 31 GPs in North 24 Parganas district (see Figure 1).¹¹

Study participants were contacted either through the GP's president (*pradhan*) or via the Block Development Office, the government body with authority over the workings of the GP. Individual meetings were then arranged with each politician at a time and place of their choice. The survey team provided information about the study and obtained written consent from all partici-

pants before the survey and experiments were conducted. Given the highly personalized nature of the approach, all individuals who were asked agreed to participate in our study.¹²

Among the 239 sampled incoming politicians, 48 had held their current position for more than 1 year, indicating that they were reelected. This leaves us with 191 incoming politicians with no prior political experience (henceforth *inexperienced*).¹³ In addition to the 48 experienced incoming politicians, we consider all of the 161 outgoing politicians to be experienced in politics,¹⁴ yielding a total of 209 “experienced” politicians. Of the experienced politicians, 17 had held elected political positions for more than 5 years, which indicates that they took office in 2013 as experienced politicians.¹⁵

Our preferred sample, on which we report in the main text, consists of the 191 inexperienced politicians

¹¹West Bengal has 23 districts and a population of approximately 90 million, of which 11 million live in North 24 Parganas district.

¹²The study involved no deception and no physical or psychological harm. Further information about our study design can be found in the SI (pp. 1–6).

¹³Incoming politicians had not taken over GP administration at the time of our study. However, we cannot rule out that “inexperienced” politicians have forms of organizational or political experience that we do not pick up in our survey.

¹⁴This group consists of individuals who chose not to (or could not) run for reelection in 2018. We were not able to identify any of them among the candidates for the 2018 elections.

¹⁵See SI Table A.1 for a summary of this information.

TABLE 1 Descriptive Statistics on Observables

	Female				Male			
	Inexperienced		Experienced		Inexperienced		Experienced	
	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE	Mean	SE
Age	35.864	0.762	39.035	0.890	42.222	1.131	47.679	0.928
Education	2.982	0.106	3.186	0.109	3.136	0.148	3.623	0.117
Reserved Position	0.882	0.031	0.907	0.032	0.728	0.050	0.698	0.045
Landholding: Yes	0.327	0.045	0.453	0.054	0.728	0.050	0.679	0.046
Affiliation TMC	0.936	0.023	0.709	0.049	0.914	0.031	0.708	0.044
Hindu	0.609	0.047	0.709	0.049	0.395	0.055	0.557	0.048
Scheduled Caste	0.355	0.046	0.477	0.054	0.222	0.046	0.255	0.043
Scheduled Tribe	0.027	0.016	0.023	0.016	0.025	0.017	0.009	0.009
Other Backward Caste	0.391	0.047	0.291	0.049	0.519	0.056	0.453	0.049
General Caste	0.227	0.040	0.209	0.044	0.235	0.047	0.283	0.044
Sample Size	110		86		81		106	

Notes: Education is an ordinal variable (no school or primary school, middle school, secondary school, higher secondary school, undergraduate or postgraduate). Reserved position is coded 1 if the seat is reserved for women, SC, ST, or OBC, and 0 if it is general (unreserved). Primary estimating sample is used. SE stands for standard error.

with the 192 experienced politicians who entered office as inexperienced in 2013—dropping from the sample the 17 politicians with more than 5 years of experience in office. This comparison comes closest to our ideal design and avoids the selection bias resulting from including politicians who have held political positions for a long time. Our preferred sample consists of 196 women and 187 men.¹⁶ Participants first completed a set of incentivized experimental tasks: (1) a dictator game, capturing generosity/altruism (Forsythe et al. 1994); (2) an ultimatum game, studying respondents' conception of fairness (Güth, Schmittberger, and Schwarze 1982); (3) a trust game, studying the inclination to trust a stranger and behave in a trustworthy manner (Berg, Dickhaut, and McCabe 1995); (4) a public goods game with a punishment option, studying cooperation and norm enforcement (Chaudhuri 2011; Ledyard 1995); (5) an investment decision game, studying attitudes toward risk (Gneezy and Potters 1997); and finally (6) the die-tossing game already mentioned, designed to test honesty (Fischbacher and Föllmi-Heusi 2013). After completing these tasks, participants responded to an extensive survey that included questions about their background, political work, and attitudes.

Table 1 presents the means and standard errors for politician characteristics in the four main subsamples of

interest (i.e., male and female, inexperienced and experienced). As expected, the experienced politicians are older than the inexperienced ones, but similar on other background characteristics. As found in other studies of India (e.g., Afridi, Iversen, and Sharan 2017; Goyal 2020), female politicians are younger than their male counterparts, with the average female–male age difference for inexperienced and experienced politicians being 7 and 9 years, respectively. The average male politician, whether experienced or inexperienced, has completed secondary schooling; the average experienced female politician has also completed secondary schooling, whereas inexperienced female politicians have somewhat less formal education, having, on average, completed middle school. Female politicians are less likely to report owning land; although 33% of inexperienced and 45% of experienced female politicians report owning land, the corresponding percentages for male politicians are 73 and 68. The majority of politicians, both men and women, are likely to be elected from reserved seats, but the corresponding percentages are higher for women—consistent with the overall pattern of male domination in Indian politics. There are more Muslims and fewer SCs among the inexperienced politicians. The share of inexperienced politicians with TMC affiliation is larger than for experienced politicians, reflecting the rising strength of that political party. These differences in the characteristics of inexperienced and experienced politicians are important possible confounders in our analysis, which we control for in our regressions.

¹⁶As a robustness check, reported in the SI (pp. 12–15), we also run all our analyses on the full sample of inexperienced politicians (N = 191) and experienced politicians (incoming and outgoing, N = 209).

Empirical Results

To capture attitudes toward corruption, respondents were asked whether they agreed with a series of vignette-type examples of nepotistic and corrupt acts by politicians, civil servants, and members of the public (inspired by Truex 2011). For example, did they agree with the statement “It is acceptable for a shopkeeper to offer a politician a small gift to help keep the tax auditor away”? To look for both a gender gap and a time-in-office effect, we ran multivariate linear models with *Experienced*, *Female*, and *Female* \times *Experienced* as the main explanatory variables. With one exception—slightly more disapproval of nepotism in giving a government job to a less qualified family member among experienced politicians—we found no statistically significant differences between the attitudes expressed by experienced or inexperienced politicians or between the men and women in the sample.¹⁷

Results from the Die-Tossing Task

We measure dishonest *behavior* using the die-tossing task. Participants were asked to throw an unbiased die 30 times in private and then report the number of sixes rolled. Participants were told they would be paid Rs. 5 for each reported six. It was made clear that the die tossing would not be monitored. It is impossible to know for certain whether a particular individual was dishonest in the die-tossing game, but knowledge of the statistical distribution of responses allows us to observe how the reported number of sixes differs from a theoretical distribution across our four subgroups. We would expect, on average, participants to report five sixes over 30 throws. In our data, the average number of reported sixes was eight (ranging from 1 to 27).

A rapidly growing body of empirical work supports the use of the die-tossing task as a proxy for propensity toward corrupt behavior. Banerjee, Baul, and Rosenblat (2015) report that the degree of untruthful reports is significantly higher among Indian students preparing to enter the country’s administrative service, well known for its endemic corruption; Hanna and Wang (2017) find a similar lack of truthfulness among students preparing to enter the Indian civil service, along with a positive correlation between untruthful reports and absenteeism among public hospital nurses; French passengers who report actual outcomes untruthfully are also more likely

to evade public transport fares (Dai, Galeotti, and Villaval 2017); Indian milkmen who are more dishonest in this game engage in greater adulteration, adding water to their milk (Kröll and Rustagi 2016). At more aggregate levels, Gächter and Schulz (2016) find that participants from countries with a high prevalence of rule violations are more dishonest in the die-tossing game than those from more law-abiding countries; and Olsen et al. (2019) find that country-level measures of corruption show strong positive correlation with the average rates of cheating in the die-tossing game.

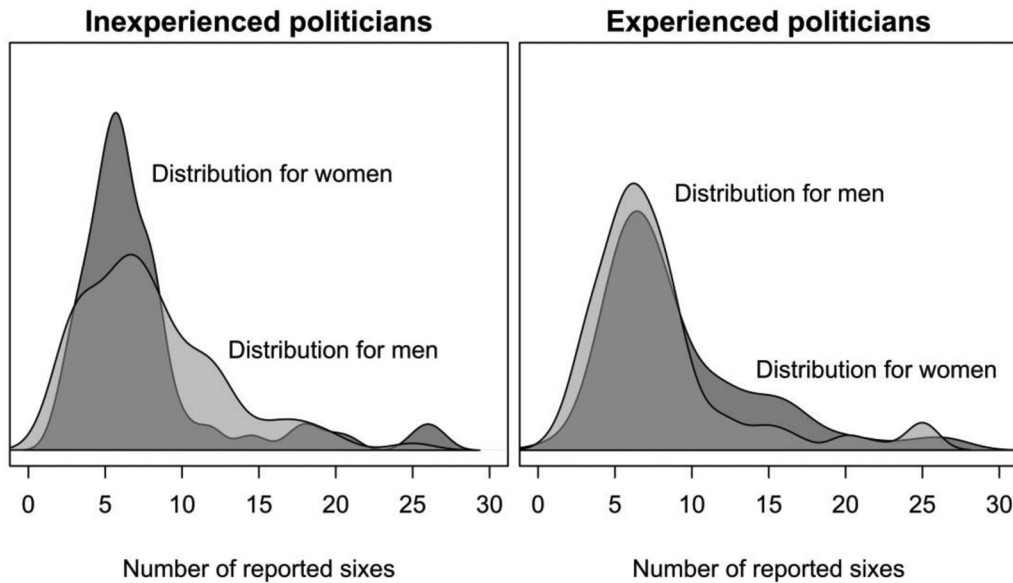
Figure 2 presents the distribution of sixes reported by inexperienced and experienced, female and male, politicians in our sample. As shown in the left panel of the figure, among the inexperienced politicians a higher share of women than men report numbers close to the expected value of 5, indicating honest answers. In the right-hand panel, the distributions for experienced men and women are more similar.

The same pattern emerges when we estimate multivariate linear models on these data, as reported in Table 2, column 1. The lower panel of Table 2 shows pairwise comparisons of the four groups. Consistent with the expectation that women are less prone to dishonesty when entering political office, inexperienced women report fewer sixes than inexperienced men (see column 1). This difference is substantial (with women reporting on average 1.3 fewer sixes than men) and statistically significant at the 10% level. Experienced female politicians, by contrast, report 2.1 more sixes than inexperienced female politicians. This difference—which is consistent with a substantial time-in-office effect—is strongly statistically significant ($p < .01$). However, there is no significant difference in the number of sixes reported by experienced male and female politicians, indicating catch-up by female politicians while in office. There is also no difference between inexperienced and experienced men, indicating that the results for women are not driven by selection bias in the types of politicians elected in 2013 versus 2018.

Testing Mechanisms

Earlier, we discussed changes in pro-sociality, risk aversion, political networks, and time horizons as possible mechanisms that can explain why a gender gap in dishonest or corrupt behavior may change with time in office. In the previous section, we find a gender gap in dishonesty among inexperienced politicians, and that women seem to change more during their time in office than men. Can these observed differences be explained by any of the proposed mechanisms?

¹⁷The list of vignettes and the results from the ordinary least squares (OLS) models are presented in the SI (pp. 7–8).

FIGURE 2 Distribution of Reported Sixes in Die-Tossing Task

Notes: The figure compares the distributions of the number of sixes reported by men and women among inexperienced (left panel) and experienced (right panel) politicians.

The Pro-Social Mechanism. To explore the pro-social mechanism, we use two well-known experimental tasks: the dictator game and the trust game. The dictator game is a two-person game with an allocator and a recipient (see Forsythe et al. 1994). The allocator is given an endowment of Rs. 100 and must then decide whether to share this—and, if so, how much—with an anonymous recipient. The recipient has no decision to make and has no initial endowment. Hence, given an allocation x , the allocator’s income is $(100 - x)$ and the recipient’s income is x . Dictator games have been extensively used by social scientists to measure generosity or altruism on the part of the allocator (see Bekkers 2007; Forsythe et al. 1994).

The trust game is also a two-person game, with one player designated as sender and the other as responder. The sender is given an initial endowment of Rs. 100 and must decide whether to transfer any part of this endowment (x), using discrete increments, to an anonymous responder. The experimenter triples the value of x and gives the amount to the matched responder, who is then asked to decide whether to return any money to the sender, and, if so, how much. The sender’s earnings will be $(100 - x + R)$, with R being the amount returned by the responder, whereas the responder’s earnings are $(3x - R)$. For the second-mover decision, we adopt the strategy method. As any positive amount transferred by the first mover is tripled, the second mover is asked to state how much he or she will return for each value of $3x$. A responder who maximizes earnings from the game will

have no incentive to send money back. Anticipating this, the sender should not transfer any money in the first instance, implying that both players will end the game with their initial endowments. However, if players are motivated by trust and reciprocity, both can end up better off.¹⁸

The first-mover decision (“trust offer”) is typically used as a measure of trust, whereas the second-mover decision is interpreted as a measure of the second mover’s trustworthiness (“trust response”). Taken together, the three decisions—altruism (as measured by the dictator game), trust (as measured by the first-mover decision in the trust game), and trustworthiness (as measured by the second-mover decision in the trust game)—should provide information on a person’s degree of pro-sociality. Regression results for these tasks are presented in columns 2–4 of Table 2. We find no evidence of female politicians (whether inexperienced or experienced) being more pro-social than their male colleagues. There is also no evidence of women becoming less pro-social with time in office: Changes in pro-sociality therefore cannot explain the changing gender gap in dishonesty.

The Risk Aversion Mechanism. A second explanation for a dynamic gender gap concerns gender differences in preferences regarding risks. We elicited risk preferences

¹⁸See SI Appendix A (p. 6) for more details on the games.

TABLE 2 Behavior in the Experimental Tasks

	Reported Number of Sixes (1)	Dictator Offer (2)	Trust Offer (3)	Trust Response (4)	Risk Preference (5)
Experienced	0.188 (0.531)	0.742 (3.237)	-2.163 (3.504)	-0.008 (0.026)	2.285 (4.528)
Female	-1.307 [†] (0.724)	-0.847 (3.281)	-2.766 (3.696)	-0.004 (0.029)	-8.879** (3.072)
Female × Experienced	1.946* (0.760)	-0.027 (5.504)	6.768 (4.629)	-0.019 (0.030)	7.555 (4.702)
Constant	13.071** (2.369)	59.211** (6.490)	52.271** (8.090)	0.393** (0.071)	66.628** (11.569)
Number of Politicians	383	383	383	383	383
Difference Estimates					
Inexperienced: Female – Male	-1.307 [†] (0.724)	-0.847 (3.281)	-2.766 (3.696)	-0.004 (0.029)	-8.879** (3.072)
Experienced: Female – Male	0.639 (0.816)	-0.874 (4.619)	4.002 (3.475)	-0.023 (0.026)	-1.324 (4.157)
Female: Experienced – Inexperienced	2.134** (0.684)	0.715 (3.936)	4.605 (2.805)	-0.028 (0.029)	9.840* (4.125)
Male: Experienced – Inexperienced	0.188 (0.531)	0.742 (3.237)	-2.163 (3.504)	-0.008 (0.026)	2.285 (4.528)

Notes: OLS models with standard errors clustered at the GP level are reported. Dependent variables: reported number of sixes (1), amount sent in dictator game (2), amount sent in trust game by first mover (3), average proportion returned by second mover in trust game (4), and amount allocated to the risky asset in the investment game (5). All models include individual-level controls: education category, age, religion, caste, landownership, TMC affiliation, and reserved seat. Additional controls include offer in dictator game (column 3) and offer in the trust game (column 4). Education is an ordinal variable (no school or primary school, middle school, secondary school, higher secondary school, undergraduate or postgraduate). Primary estimating sample is used. Full set of results is presented in SI Table C1 (p. 9). [†] $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

through the investment game proposed and discussed in Gneezy and Potters (1997). In this task, each player is given the option of investing any part of an initial endowment of Rs. 100 in a risky hypothetical project. The project offers a 50% probability of tripling the amount invested and a 50% probability of losing the invested amount. The player can keep any amount he or she chooses not to invest. The higher the investment in the risky asset, the less risk-averse a person is interpreted as being (see Dasgupta et al. 2015).

Column 5 of Table 2 shows the results from the investment game. The coefficient for *Female* shows that inexperienced female politicians invest approximately

8.9 percentage points less than inexperienced males ($p < .01$). Consistent with our expectations, this indicates that inexperienced female politicians are considerably more risk-averse than inexperienced male politicians. As with dishonesty, this difference disappears over time: Experienced female politicians invest 9.8 percentage points more than inexperienced female politicians ($p < .05$). As we find little difference in investment between inexperienced and experienced male politicians, this difference seems to be confined to female politicians: Women enter office more risk-averse than men but, as with dishonesty, the gender gap in risk aversion appears to disappear with time in office.

The Network Mechanism. Measuring political networks is challenging, and we do this in two ways. First, we use political connections within the family as an indicator of the politician's having access to political networks before entering political office.¹⁹ Second, we consider whether the politician received help from others in his or her political work.²⁰ The variable *Receiving Help* could be capturing that these politicians are in regular touch with others who are more experienced in politics, indicating prior access to political networks; it could also be picking up that someone is a mere "proxy" or "token" politician, implying limited real exposure to the political game.²¹ Either way, we should expect less resocialization during their time in office and, consequently, a weaker time-in-office effect, among those who receive help.²²

To examine whether political networks can explain the initial and changing gender gap in dishonesty, we estimate our model for the die-tossing game separately for politicians with and without prior political networks. If political connections facilitate socialization into corrupt networks, we would expect a larger initial gender gap among those who enter politics without political networks; we would also expect a larger change in this group as they acquire, and get socialized into, new political networks. The regression results for having political connections in the family are presented in columns 1 and 2 of Table 3, and the ones for receiving help in columns 3 and 4. As expected, we find a large and statistically significant initial gender gap among those who say they do not receive help in their political work.²³ For the subsamples with and without political connections in the family, none of the estimates of an initial gender gap are statistically significant from zero.

¹⁹*Political Connections* = 1 for politicians with family members who have previously occupied political leadership positions: 26% of female and 21% of male inexperienced politicians; corresponding percentages are 30% and 21% for experienced politicians.

²⁰*Receiving Help* = 1 for politicians who say they got help from family members or others in their political work: 78% of female and 43% of male inexperienced politicians; corresponding percentages are 65% and 39% for experienced politicians.

²¹Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004b) found that 43% of elected women in GPs in West Bengal functioned as proxy politicians assisted by their spouses.

²²This has implications for whether we should expect to see a propensity toward corrupt behavior translate into corruption in real-life politics. We take up this in the section "External validity and generalizability."

²³There is an initial gender gap among those who report receiving help, too, which is what we should expect if this measure is picking up proxy politicians with limited political exposure, but this is not significantly different from zero.

Even more consistent with our expectations are the estimates of a time-in-office effect across the subgroups. Table 3, column 1 shows a large and strongly statistically significant ($p < .01$) difference between experienced and inexperienced women (on average 2.79 more sixes), which suggests that most of the change we observe is driven by women without political connections in the family (women with weaker prior political networks). Similarly, we find that the difference between inexperienced and experienced women in our data is driven entirely by those who do not receive help in their political work, indicating that those who enter political life with limited political networks are the ones who change the most during their time in office.

The Time Horizon Mechanism. A fourth possible mechanism for the changing gender gap in dishonesty relates to differences in time horizons, since short time horizons in office create an incentive to behave dishonestly (Ferraz and Finan 2011). The reservation system is one factor that is worth considering in this regard since the rotation of reserved seats effectively imposes a term limit for many politicians—particularly for general-category male politicians who are not eligible to run in reserved seats.²⁴

In columns 1 and 2 in Table 4, comparing dishonesty among politicians elected into reserved and nonreserved seats, we see little difference between the two subsamples. There is no evidence of general-category men being more prone to dishonest behavior, and the dishonesty difference between inexperienced and experienced female politicians is pronounced for both sets of women. Therefore, short time horizons related to reservation status cannot explain the changing gender gap.

A more direct route to analyzing the time horizon mechanism involves studying *aspirations*. If women have lower political aspirations, they may be more attracted to extracting short-term gains from office. To examine this mechanism, we asked participants whether they aspired to stand for political office in the future.

We find no gender difference in aspirations for future political office among experienced or inexperienced politicians, although both male and female inexperienced politicians report significantly higher aspirations for future political office than do their experienced counterparts.

When the sample is split into those with and without political aspirations (columns 3 and 4 in Table 4),

²⁴However, we do not expect much of a difference in time horizons since those elected to reserved seats have slim chances of getting reelected if the quota is removed (Bhavnani 2009; Jensenius 2017).

TABLE 3 The Network Mechanism

	Political Connections		Received Help	
	No (1)	Yes (2)	No (3)	Yes (4)
Experienced	0.262 (0.719)	0.405 (1.239)	-0.254 (0.794)	0.981 (0.781)
Female	-1.096 (1.001)	-1.476 (1.378)	-1.918* (0.895)	-1.367 (1.264)
Female × Experienced	2.526* (1.040)	-0.043 (1.755)	3.741* (1.545)	0.686 (1.116)
Constant	13.666** (2.843)	10.165** (2.996)	14.421** (3.058)	11.557** (2.376)
Number of Politicians	289	94	165	218
Difference Estimates				
Inexperienced: Female – Male	-1.096 (1.001)	-1.476 (1.378)	-1.918* (0.895)	-1.367 (1.264)
Experienced: Female – Male	1.429 (1.040)	-1.519 (1.164)	1.823 (1.236)	-0.681 (1.189)
Female: Experienced – Inexperienced	2.788** (0.799)	0.362 (1.104)	3.487* (1.314)	1.666 [†] (0.874)
Male: Experienced – Inexperienced	0.262 (0.719)	0.405 (1.239)	-0.254 (0.794)	0.981 (0.781)

Notes: OLS models with standard errors clustered at the GP level are reported. Dependent variable: reported number of sixes. Additional controls (in columns 2 and 4) include education category, age, religion, caste, whether household owns land, TMC affiliation, and whether elected from a reserved seat. Primary estimating sample is used. Full set of results, including the controls, is presented in SI Table C2 (p. 10).

[†] $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

we observe a notable but statistically insignificant gender gap for both categories of inexperienced politicians. However, the strongly significant result ($p < .01$) in column 4 indicates that the changing gender gap in dishonesty is driven by women with high (rather than low) political aspirations. Our findings thus suggest that short time horizons do not explain the changing gender gap.

External Validity and Generalizability

A key question is how well these results travel: to real-life behavior, to other locations, and to other areas of public life. A strength of our study is that our results capture the

real-life behavior of actual politicians. As we have seen, some of these elected representatives choose to be dishonest for personal gain when presented with the opportunity. Equally important, however, is whether behavior in a game setting translates into corrupt behavior in the everyday work of these politicians. As discussed earlier, the die-tossing game is a measure of dishonesty, but it can also be considered a valid proxy for the *propensity* toward corrupt behavior beyond the scope of the game itself. Whether corrupt behavior will in fact increase is likely to depend on opportunity—for example, whether there are credible accountability mechanisms in place. In local politics in India, where corruption is widespread and few checks have been established, it seems likely that many politicians will act on their inclinations.

TABLE 4 The Time Horizon Mechanism

	Reserved		Aspiration	
	No (1)	Yes (2)	No (3)	Yes (4)
Experienced	-0.181 (1.029)	0.255 (0.657)	0.754 (1.221)	0.292 (0.555)
Female	-2.544 (1.546)	-1.013 (0.716)	-1.320 (1.681)	-1.350 (0.806)
Female × Experienced	3.118* (1.491)	1.718* (0.793)	1.116 (1.552)	1.989* (0.816)
Constant	8.856* (3.315)	13.418** (2.560)	19.654** (6.208)	11.173** (2.494)
Number of Politicians	75	308	99	284
Difference Estimates				
Inexperienced: Female – Male	-2.544 (1.546)	-1.013 (0.716)	-1.320 (1.681)	-1.350 (0.806)
Experienced: Female – Male	0.574 (1.353)	0.705 (0.954)	-0.204 (1.236)	0.639 (0.903)
Female: Experienced – Inexperienced	2.936* (1.127)	1.973** (0.701)	1.870 (1.347)	2.281** (0.777)
Male: Experienced – Inexperienced	-0.181 (1.029)	0.255 (0.657)	0.754 (1.221)	0.292 (0.555)

Notes: OLS models with standard errors clustered at the GP level are reported. Dependent variable: reported number of sixes. Additional controls (in columns 2 and 4) include education category, age, religion, caste, whether household owns land, TMC affiliation, and whether elected from a reserved seat. Primary estimating sample is used. Full set of results, including the controls, is presented in SI Table C3 (p. 11).

[†] $p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

One reason why women may act in a less corrupt manner than men in real-life politics, even if their propensity toward corrupt behavior becomes similar, can be drawn from the literature on differences in men's and women's policy interests (see Bauhr, Charron, and Wängnerud 2019). Studies across the world, including in India, have shown that women in public office often invest efforts in securing more encompassing public service delivery, particularly in policy areas that women care more deeply about (e.g., Bratton and Ray 2002; Chattopadhyay and Duflo 2004b). This, in addition to women's interest in institution building, may result in fewer opportunities for engaging in malfeasance (see Jha and Sarangi 2019). As a result, even if men and women

are similarly inclined as regards corrupt behavior, there might be a reduction in corrupt behavior where more women hold positions of power.

Another reason why behavior in the game may not translate into changes in real-life corruption relates to how common it is for women (and men) to get assistance in their political work. As noted above, a large share of politicians report getting help from family members or others. If a large share of these elected politicians are in fact proxies for others, and thus restricted in their work as elected representatives, their attitudes and behaviors will have limited real-life impact.

To what extent can our results be generalized? Our findings indicate that gender gaps in corrupt behavior,

and in other forms of political activity, result from differences in experiences and socialization. This implies that differences between men and women (or other groups) may be less pronounced in settings where their lives are more similar.²⁵ Conversely, in a society with large gender gaps, we should expect greater differences between men and women entering politics. Further, the more pronounced the difference in culture inside and outside of politics, the more likely are changes among both men and women as they gain political experience. In our study of village-level politics in India, there is scant cultural change for men who enter politics, as they are often already embedded in the political culture in their villages; by contrast, entering “the game” at a higher level of politics may result in greater change among men as well. Similar arguments may apply to other arenas of public life and positions of trust and influence, such as in the police force or the civil service—we consider this an important avenue for future research.

Conclusions

Increasing the share of women in politics has been promoted as a way to reduce corruption and curtail dishonest behavior. However, relatively little is known about why and under what circumstances women are—and will remain—more honest and less corrupt than men. Among ordinary members of the public, women have been found to be more altruistic and honest, at least in industrialized countries. It requires a considerable leap of faith to argue that a similar behavioral pattern should be expected among elected female politicians around the world; likewise with the assumption that gender gaps in attitudes and behavior will remain static as newly elected representatives gain experience and become socialized into heterogeneous and localized political cultures.

Our study theorizes the gender gap in dishonest behavior as dynamic rather than static. There are differences between men and women in all societies—but if these differences are due to experiences and socialization, rather than inherent traits, they must be recognized as both context-specific and malleable. Women may be less prone to corruption when they enter politics, but exposure to the political game, particularly the normalization of dishonesty and corrupt behavior, is likely to change them. Our study from West Bengal indicates precisely this: that women who enter politics are less likely to

engage in dishonest behavior than men, but that this gender gap narrows with time in office.

Our findings suggest that a reduction in risk aversion and a strengthening of their political networks are responsible for these changes. While an important literature holds that short time horizons accentuate corruption, this does not explain the changing gender gap in our study. Our measures of pro-sociality do not indicate that women become less pro-social with time in office, but this may be different using other measures or when studying other settings. With greater gender differences in how the first term in office is experienced—for example, because women face more hostility—the trajectories and time horizons of women and men may also differ. More research is needed to establish whether women and men are indeed socialized into the same political environment. Regardless, our study of real-life politicians lends little support to the idea that women’s entry into political institutions will help clean out corruption or other malfeasance—except, perhaps, briefly.

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²⁵This echoes Goetz (2007) on the importance of status differences between men and women.

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Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.

Appendix A: Further information on the study

Appendix B: Self-reported attitudes towards nepotism and corruption

Appendix C: Full Set of Regression Results

Appendix D: Robustness check on full sample of inexperienced and experienced politicians