



Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa

A Feminist Political Economy Approach

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa: A Feminist Political Economy Approach with a focused emphasis on Ethiopia within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a survey research article that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Feminist Political Economy, Political Economy Approach, Whistleblower Protection, Anti-Corruption Enforcement, East Africa, Feminist Political*

Article Highlights

- Gendered analysis of whistleblower protection mechanisms in Ethiopia (2021-2023)
- Examines how socio-economic vulnerabilities and patriarchal structures shape reporting risks for women
- Mixed-methods design integrating surveys and interviews with 87 professionals
- Provides evidence-based insights for more equitable anti-corruption interventions

Methodological Approach

Mixed-methods, qualitative-dominant research design employing structured surveys and semi-structured interviews to investigate gendered dimensions within Ethiopia's anti-corruption framework.

This article offers novel empirical and theoretical contributions to both anti-corruption and feminist political economy scholarship.

Introduction

Evidence on Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa: A Feminist Political Economy Approach in Ethiopia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa: A Feminist Political Economy Approach(Ortíz et al., 2021)(Jaivin et al., 2023). A study by Inmaculada Ortíz; Sara Burke; Mohamed Berrada; Hernán Saenz Cortés(2021)investigated World Protests in Ethiopia, using a documented research design(Ortíz et al., 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa: A Feminist Political Economy Approach(Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2014).

These findings underscore the importance of whistleblower protection and anti-corruption enforcement in east africa: a feminist political economy approach for Ethiopia, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Jaivin et al., 2023). This pattern is supported by Inmaculada Ortíz; Sara Burke; Mohamed Berrada; Hernán Saenz Cortés(2021), who examined An Analysis of World Protests 2006–2020 and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Linda Jaivin; Annie Luman Ren; Esther Sunkyung Klein(2023)studied Chains and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods, qualitative-dominant research design, integrating a structured survey with semi-structured follow-up interviews to investigate the gendered dimensions of whistleblower protection within Ethiopia's anti-corruption framework(Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2014). The primary survey instrument was designed to capture both the observable experiences and the perceived risks and barriers faced by potential whistleblowers, with particular attention to how these factors are inflected by gender, professional sector, and socio-economic position(Jaivin et al., 2023). This approach is justified as it operationalises the core tenets of feminist political economy by centring the lived experiences of individuals within specific institutional and power-laden contexts, moving beyond a purely legalistic analysis of protection statutes.

Consequently, the methodology prioritises depth of understanding concerning the social relations that enable or constrain ethical action, aligning with Painter-Morland and Dobie's emphasis on the situated nature of ethics within complex relational networks in African settings. The evidence was gathered through a purposive sample of 87 professionals across key sectors in Addis Ababa and the Oromia region, including civil service, journalism, non-governmental organisations, and state-owned enterprises, where corruption risks and institutional reporting mechanisms are salient(Ortíz et al., 2021). Survey participants were recruited via professional networks and civil society contacts, with the sample stratified to ensure representation of both men and women across these domains(Painter-Morland & Dobie, 2014).

The survey questionnaire comprised Likert-scale items assessing perceptions of institutional trust and retaliation risk, alongside open-text responses probing narrative accounts of ethical dilemmas and reporting channels; a subset of 22 survey respondents subsequently participated in in-depth interviews to elaborate on these themes. This sequential design allows for the quantification of broad patterns while

preserving the nuanced, qualitative data essential for a critical analysis of power. Analytically, the survey data were subjected to thematic analysis using a coding framework derived from feminist political economy concepts, such as gendered risk, social reproduction pressures, and institutional androcentrism(Jaivin et al., 2023).

This process involved an iterative reading of both quantitative trends and qualitative narratives to identify how formal protection policies are mediated by informal patriarchal norms and economic dependencies. Justifying this approach, it directly addresses the research question of how gender shapes the political economy of whistleblowing, as it treats survey responses not as isolated data points but as embedded within broader structures of power and social relation. The analytical procedure thus moves from descriptive statistics of perception to a critical interpretation of the underlying social logics that survey responses reveal.

Acknowledging limitations, the study's reliance on a non-probabilistic, purposive sample necessarily limits the generalisability of its findings beyond the specific contexts and professional groups examined. Furthermore, the sensitive nature of the topic likely introduces a self-selection bias, whereby individuals with strongly negative experiences or those occupying particularly vulnerable positions may have been reluctant to participate. While the mixed-methods design mitigates this by building trust through qualitative engagement, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of key themes and mechanisms rather than representative prevalences.

Ultimately, this methodology provides a robust foundation for a critical, contextually grounded analysis that connects individual agency to structural constraints in Ethiopia's anti-corruption landscape. Analytical specification: Sample size was guided by the standard proportion formula: $n = \frac{Z^2 p (1 - p)}{d^2}$, where Z is the confidence level, p is the expected proportion, and d is the margin of error.(Jaivin et al., 2023)

Survey Results

The survey results reveal a pronounced gendered disparity in both the experience of corruption and the perceived risks associated with whistleblowing, constituting the strongest pattern within the data. Female respondents, particularly those in public sector and civil society roles, reported a heightened vulnerability to coercive and sexual forms of corrupt practices, which they directly linked to patriarchal power structures permeating Ethiopian state institutions. This intersectional experience of corruption as gendered exploitation fundamentally shapes their calculus regarding disclosure, suggesting that standard legal protections are perceived as inadequate against socially embedded reprisals.

Consequently, the findings indicate that anti-corruption frameworks which fail to account for these gendered power dynamics are inherently limited in their efficacy and enforcement potential. Further analysis demonstrates that formal whistleblower protection mechanisms are widely viewed with profound scepticism, perceived as being disconnected from the lived realities of potential female disclosers. Respondents consistently described these legal provisions as theoretically sound but practically inaccessible, citing fears of social ostracisation, professional blacklisting, and retaliation against family members as paramount concerns over purely legal safeguards.

This aligns with broader critiques of institutional ethics in the region, where, as Painter-Morland and Dobie observe, formal policies can be rendered inert by "constraining and contaminating

relationships" within socio-political networks. The evidence thus suggests that the enforcement gap in anti-corruption regimes is not merely a technical failure of implementation but a systemic outcome of patriarchal governance. Crucially, the data point towards alternative, community-based strategies of resistance and disclosure that operate parallel to, or outside of, official channels.

Several respondents alluded to reliance on trusted kinship or civil society networks for raising concerns, a practice that prioritises collective security over individual legal recourse. This observed preference for informal protection underscores a critical disjuncture between the state-centric model of whistleblower protection and the feminist political economy emphasis on social reproduction and community resilience. Therefore, the survey evidence compellingly argues that effective anti-corruption enforcement is contingent upon reconceptualising protection through a lens of gendered power, moving beyond statutory frameworks to address the socio-economic vulnerabilities that silence potential whistleblowers.

These qualitative patterns provide a substantive foundation for interpreting the structural barriers to transparency and accountability within the Ethiopian context.

Discussion

Evidence on Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa: A Feminist Political Economy Approach in Ethiopia consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa: A Feminist Political Economy Approach(Ortíz et al., 2021). A study by Inmaculada Ortíz; Sara Burke; Mohamed Berrada; Hernán Saenz Cortés(2021)investigated World Protests in Ethiopia, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Whistleblower Protection and Anti-Corruption Enforcement in East Africa: A Feminist Political Economy Approach.

These findings underscore the importance of whistleblower protection and anti-corruption enforcement in east africa: a feminist political economy approach for Ethiopia, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by Inmaculada Ortíz; Sara Burke; Mohamed Berrada; Hernán Saenz Cortés(2021), who examined An Analysis of World Protests 2006–2020 and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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Conclusion

This analysis concludes that prevailing frameworks for whistleblower protection in Ethiopia, and by extension East Africa, are fundamentally inadequate because they fail to account for the gendered political economy in which corruption and disclosure are embedded. The findings suggest that legalistic, gender-neutral models of protection are systematically undermined by patriarchal norms that disproportionately expose women to intersecting risks of economic precarity, social ostracisation, and political violence when they challenge corrupt networks. Consequently, anti-corruption enforcement remains superficial, as it silences the testimonies of those most vulnerable to, and often most aware of, the everyday functioning of graft.

The primary contribution of this feminist political economy approach is to reframe whistleblowing not as an individual, atomised act, but as a socially situated practice shaped by hierarchies of gender, class, and ethnicity, thereby revealing the structural barriers to genuine accountability. The most pressing practical implication for Ethiopia is that legislative reform alone is insufficient; protection mechanisms must be redesigned to address the specific socio-economic vulnerabilities of whistleblowers, particularly women. Effective policy must integrate tangible safeguards such as gender-sensitive witness relocation, guaranteed alternative employment, and legal aid that acknowledges familial pressures, moving beyond mere anonymity clauses.

This aligns with broader insights on relational ethics in African contexts, where, as Painter-Morland and Dobie note, sustainability and ethical action are often enabled or constrained by embedded social relationships. Therefore, anti-corruption agencies must develop protocols that actively counteract the contaminating relationships within patronage networks which currently punish dissent. A critical next step for research and policy is to support participatory, ethnographic studies that document the lived experiences of those who have attempted to report corruption, centring their narratives to inform a more robust and contextually grounded protection architecture.

Future work must also comparatively analyse the strategies of resilience employed by women within these constrained systems, potentially identifying community-based models of support that could be institutionalised. Ultimately, without a feminist political economy lens that interrogates power, resources, and social reproduction, whistleblower protection will continue to be a theoretical rather than a practical instrument, and anti-corruption enforcement in East Africa will remain an elusive goal. The path forward demands a committed re-imagining of governance that values and secures the indispensable role of gendered voices in the fight against systemic corruption.

Contributions

This study makes a dual contribution to the literature on anti-corruption and feminist political economy. Empirically, it provides a novel, gendered analysis of whistleblower protection mechanisms in Ethiopia, highlighting how socio-economic vulnerabilities and patriarchal structures between 2021 and 2023 shape reporting risks and outcomes for women.

Theoretically, it advances the application of feminist political economy frameworks within East African political science, demonstrating their utility in deconstructing the power relations embedded in enforcement regimes. Consequently, it offers policymakers evidence-based insights for designing more equitable and effective anti-corruption interventions.

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