Memo: Dear Participants at the “Politics and Crisis” workshop

I am presenting one version of my dissertation prospectus. It is about how the public reacts to political scandals as a sub-type of political crises. I present four case studies, ideas how scandals fit available theories, and an outline of future research. The prospectus is still very much in progress, and that is why your feedback will be invaluable. My hope is to get the benefit of hearing what you think are the most and least fruitful lines of pursuit. Thank you very much in advance for your feedback!
Can media reports about incumbents’ misconduct affect the popularity of the government? If they do, to what extent is the public affected by reported corruption and marital infidelity? These questions aim at the very core of two equally venerable traditions in political science. On the one hand, the 3 Ps theory contends that media reports are largely epiphenomenal, because economic prosperity, political peace, and party affiliation are the main determinants of public support for the incumbents. On the other hand, theories of media politics argue that citizens are heavily influenced by the character of a politician, not only by his/her performance in office.

My dissertation endeavors to illuminate this theoretical debate and to draw generalizable conclusions about the conditions under which political scandals influence public support for governments across democracies. Scandal is defined here as the “intense public communication about a real or imagined defect”, and explicates the “attempt to govern on the basis of words and images that diffuse through the mass media.” (Zaller 1998, Jamieson 1995, Funk 1993, Lowi 1987)

I intend to resolve five central questions: first, when and how much exactly do media frenzies about purported misconduct affect the public?; second, does the frequency of reports of have a diminishing marginal effect on public support for the government?; third, do the gravity and the type of alleged misdemeanor matter?; fourth, are there certain strategies that the incumbents can use to control the damage to the government’s public image after the scandal erupts?; fifth, does the institutional design facilitate the exposition of political blame in the wake of a scandal? During the research phase, I will create an original database of “media frenzies” by performing content analysis of major
national newspapers. These data will be regressed on information of public satisfaction with the governments in Italy, Russia, Germany, Great Britain and the USA.

The importance of this research agenda is underscored by John Zaller: “the Lewinsky affair buttresses some work in political science, and undermines the importance of other work. The tradition of studies on economic and retrospective voting, which maintains that the public responds to the substance of party performance, seems strengthened by the Lewinsky matter. On the other hand, the tradition of studies that focuses on the mass media, political psychology, and elite influence, including such diverse studies as Edelman’s *Symbolic Uses of Politics* (1964) and my own *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion* (1992) seems somewhat weaker. It is reasonable to think that the ground has shifted beneath those two traditions in a way that scholars will need to accommodate… One lesson for political science then is that more attention needs to be given to the general question of when Media Politics (in the sense of trying to mobilize public support through mass communication) matters and when it doesn’t, and to do so in a manner that doesn’t presuppose the answer… The results will be interesting however they come out.” (Zaller 1998)

**Literature Review**

The effect of reported misconduct does not lend itself to a ready quantitative measure. A vast and sophisticated body of literature contends that inflation, unemployment, party identification and warfare play a major role in shaping public support for the incumbents. (Sharpe 1995, Lewis-Beck 1988, Kramer 1971, Mueller 1970) These studies tend to dismiss the effects of media frenzies that reveal new and controversial information with the justification that people’s prior beliefs direct and
predetermine the processing of news. The public is expected to focus on the “bottom line” criteria (Zaller 1998), such as welfare and peace, and to disregard the newly acquired contradictory information by engaging in “motivated reasoning.” “The simplest explanation for Clinton’s continuing support [after the Lewinsky scandal] is probably the most compelling: to borrow from his 1992 campaign, “the economy stupid.” (Jacobson 1999)

On the opposite side of the debate, studies provide equally compelling reasons to believe that frequent media reports of incumbents’ misconduct can influence the public support for the government. Susan Pharr shows statistically that the “single best predictor” of the public dissatisfaction with the Japanese government for the period from 1978 to 1996 is the number of corruption articles in the press. (Pharr 2000) Della Porta suggests that for Italy, France and Germany, there is a remarkable correlation between citizens’ confidence in the government and perceived corruption. (Della Porta 2000) Another challenge to the performance-based theory is posited by a statistical study that shows that negative evaluations of the economy decrease respect for British government officials by 0.22, while the effect of news about scandalous behavior was twice as big: 0.56. (Bowler/Karp 2004) A similar ranking of relative importance of corruption and economic factors is conveyed by an opinion poll conducted in France in 1992, which found that 29% of those polled cited “corruption scandals” as the first reason why they did not vote for the Socialist Party, while “unemployment” was a distant second. (Adut 2004) 48% said that their opinion of the Socialist would improve if they demonstrated a “tougher attitude to scandals” (Fay 1998) Mandelli shows that each U.S. president’s approval rating dropped at least ten percent points for three out of four major scandals.
(Mandelli 1998) An analysis of the 1992 American national election study data indicates that the House bank scandal reduced the vote for House incumbents by approximately five percentage points. (Dimock) Doig argues that the end of the Major government in Great Britain and its subsequent defeat in the 1997 elections was caused by the climate of “sleaze.” (Doig 2001) In addition to the studies mentioned subsequently in the paper, the following studies also argue for the significant impact of scandals: Miller 1979, Orren 1997, Clarke et al. 1998, Kepplinger 1996, Farrell et al. 1998, Thompson 2000, Anderson/Tverdova 2003.

Why is it that these two streams of literatures have such a different take on the importance of scandals? The core of the contention becomes much clearer if we look closely at the causal mechanisms that these theories employ. It seems that the real disagreement is not whether scandals matter, or not, but whether the public opinion is sophisticated, and how intense its preferences are.

Economic voting and party identification studies contend that new information coming from the media is not powerful enough to overturn previous judgments. They propose two different causal mechanisms of “motivated reasoning”: the “hot cognition hypothesis” prescribing an emotional route to belief preservation, or the rational Bayesian updating model. In both cases, however, supporters and detractors of the alleged politician are expected to construe the gravity of the scandalous offense, its truthfulness, and its importance in a way that bolsters the existing opinion. (Fischle 2000, Lodge/Taber 2002) “Cognitive dissonance” is an older version of the “motivated reasoning” and “hot cognition” theories, and contends that public satisfaction with the government’s
performance is so strong that trumps quickly whatever cognitive dissonance the scandal provokes. (Lodge/Taber 2002)

Media and cultural studies purport that scandalous news can affect the public through framing, learning, and agenda setting. Their counter-claim is that people are often undecided about the state of the economy or their party preferences, that they cannot easily conceptualize the relative importance of various issues, or that they simply do not want to be governed by corrupt and dishonorable officials. Even in established democracies, there are a lot of undecided voters, and in less established democracies, it is much harder to have strong party affiliations in a fluid party landscape. (Colton 2000)

One could argue, however, that narrowing down the scope of the debate solely to the preferences of the voters deprives it of its vitality and complexity. Individual level preference constitute just one, albeit a very important aspect of the puzzle. Scandals are a dynamic confluence of the impact of public opinion, media influences, actors’ strategies, institutional set-up, and cultural traits, and the exclusion of any of these factors from the argument largely misses the interactive and multi-dimensional nature of the phenomenon. Relatively unexamined, scandals provide a convenient analytic approach to establish how these factors interact, and what is their relative significance. To achieve this, the researcher needs an original database that is comparable across countries, and methods to operationalize and test the hypotheses in a consistent and reliable manner.
Research Agenda

My first research task is to deliver convincing statistical evidence of the magnitude and duration of the impact of media frenzies on popular judgment. A major objection to the significance of scandals is that their effects are ephemeral. Daron shows that presidential approval ratings bounce back to previous levels shortly after the end of the scandals, and Mandelli reaches a similar conclusion after examining the effect of the Clean Hands investigation in Italy. (Daron 1995, Mandelli 1998) Other statistics counter these claims by demonstrating that the effects of some scandals wear out only after 8 years. (Keele 2004) But even if the long-lasting effect of media frenzies tends to be negligible, if scandals occur shortly before an election, they can still play a significant role in determining the outcome of that election. Thus concerns over timing may override considerations of transience.

Hypothesis: Media reports of incumbents’ misconduct have short-term effects, but still affect public opinion as they tend to emerge during election campaigns.

Hypothesis: Media reports have long- term effects.

My second goal is to determine whether the frequency of scandals affects their effectiveness. More frequent media scandals will eventually start affecting public less as it grows accustomed to the idea that politicians are dishonorable and dishonest. The rationale is akin to the cultivation hypothesis according to which TV viewers become less responsive to overabundance of news about crime. (Gerbner 1976) Overabundance of scandals can de-sensitize the public gradually or suddenly. Frequent media reporting of incumbents’ misconduct can exert a gradual, diminishing marginal effect on the public opinion. Alternatively, the great volume of scandalous reports may reach a certain
equilibrium level which signals to the public that most governments are corrupt, and therefore corruption should not be a criterion for government evaluation.

**Hypothesis:** More media reports of scandals gradually start producing less effect on the public.

**Hypothesis:** Media reports of corruption hit an equilibrium point, and then gradually start producing less effect on the public.

A third task of the research is to establish whether some types of allegations resonate more with the public than others. In outlining avenues for future investigations, Fischle notes: “I have observed that there is a great deal of variance in public reaction to scandal…it seems that the manner in which the voters react depends not only on the attributes of the individual, but also on the character of the scandal itself…because it is often the nature of the scandal itself that provides the justifications to maintain prior beliefs”. (Fischle 2000) Zaller exemplifies the issue very well: “suppose that the Watergate investigation of Richard Nixon had taken place in the context of Bill Clinton’s booming economy rather than, as was the case, in the context of gasoline shortages and stagnation. Would Nixon have been forced from office under these circumstances? Or, if Clinton were saddled with Nixon’s economy, would Clinton be, at this point, on the verge of impeachment? These are, I believe, real questions.” (Zaller 1998) Another relevant question is whether the infidelity, which was harmless for Clinton, would have been critical for a Republican President with a proclaimed affection for family values. While the questions have already been raised, the answers have been largely missing. One exception is a study that establishes that the type of allegations matters insofar as tax
evasion charges against US congressmen incur more negativity than reports of marital infidelity. (Funk 1993)

Does public opinion in other countries sanction media reports of corruption as much as public opinion in the USA? What is the comparative importance of family values across countries? This question brings up the importance of national and cultural determinants of public opinion. Political cultural studies argue that regardless of the prominence of the issue in the media, revelations about certain types of misconduct will impact the public by virtue of the values that are embedded in it. (Ingelhart 2000)

Holmes shows that while only 10% of the Americans would prefer a competent but corrupt politician, 15% of the Germans, 23% of the Italians and 25% of the Russians said that the incumbent’s corruptibility is less important than competence. (Holmes 2003)

Using Ingelhart’s typology, one would predict that the public in traditional countries should punish reports of private misconduct more than that in secular-rational countries. (Inglehart 2000) Within the category of historically Protestant countries with more than $15,000 per capita income, scandals concerning marital infidelity in the more traditional USA should cause more public uproar than the same scandals in Great Britain (middle range), and even more so than in West Germany, which is classified as very secular-rational. I will test for the variance in the cultural perception of nine categories of alleged misconduct: incompetence, verbal gaff, corruption, illegal action, nepotism, bribery, illegal action, marital infidelity and sexual harassment.

Hypothesis: Private misconduct causes more negative publicity for the government in traditional countries than in secular-rational countries.
Hypothesis: Private misconduct causes more negative publicity for the government in more prosperous economies than in less prosperous economies.

The fourth research task is to determine whether the strategies of the incumbents can affect the public perception after the scandal has erupted. The theoretical roots of this research tradition go back to political communication and leadership studies, such as Edelman’s Symbolic Politics. (Edelman 1964) Edelman proposes that all political actions and events are characterized by a division into a principal value - which represents the actual essence of a political action, and a dramaturgical symbolic value - which represents the presentation of the action for the public. In respect to scandals, Thumber argues that “high-profile cases illustrate that an efficient crisis management plan, with an emphasis on skilful news management, can be effective in lessening the damage such catastrophes can wreak…Indeed, those that have managed crises well in public relations terms have even managed to benefit from them.” (Thumber 2004)

Durkheim bolsters the idea that rulers can increase their political capital by embarking on certain strategic actions. He maintains that public punishment of scandalous officials may increase the legitimacy of the existing governing body. (Durkheim 1995) In sync with the Durkheimian tradition, political scientists Dowding and Dewan reveal that when the British prime minister dismisses a Cabinet member involved in a scandal, the government popularity bounces back. (Dowding and Dewan 2005)

But the presentational strategies of the government should not be limited to the issue of resignations, and the relation between the prime minister and his subordinates. The tactical moves of individual Cabinet members should also be considered. For
example, many cases show that a repeated denial of an adulterous relationship can be much worse than its prompt public admission. A case in point is John Profumo, the secretary of the State of War of Britain in 1960, who denied that he had an extramarital affair. Arguably, his career was not ended by his affair, but by his public denials, and the fact that his lover was an alleged spy. In his letter of resignation, Profumo retracted his denial: “ I said that there was no impropriety in this association [with Keeler]. To my very deep regret, I have to admit that this was not true and that I misled you, my colleagues, and the House…I have come to realize that, by this deception, I have been guilty of a grave misdemeanor, and I cannot remain a member of your Administration, nor the House of Commons.” (Profumo cited in Thompson 2000, p.134)

Similarly, Clinton’s biggest predicament was that he lied under oath: “There is Substantial and Credible Information that President Clinton Committed Acts that May Constitute Grounds for an Impeachment as ...he lied under oath as a defendant in Jones. v. Clinton regarding his sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky.” (The Starr Report 2000) These examples show that even if scandals of private nature do not strike a cord with the public’s values, as Inglehart and other cultural theorists would suggest, they can still be important as they serve as conduits to the commitment or the revelation of other more damaging actions. In light of this discussion, strategies to contain the spread of allegations of private misconduct become particularly important.

In cases of misuse of office, the technique of deflecting blame, known as “the lightning rod” is more widespread. (Ellis 1994) A number of other studies list alternative elite responses to policy fiascos and corruption scandals. (Bovens & t’Hart 1996, Brandstrom & Kuipers 2003, and Maor 2004) I will test whether government incumbents
can shape their image by coding the strategies of the actors. Borrowing from Schuetz’s
typology, I will differentiate between aggressive strategies, such as derogate competitors,
find scapegoat, attack criticizer, and self-promotion, and defensive strategies, such as
denial, reframing, disassociation, claim no knowledge, and silence. (Schuetz 1998)¹

_Hypothesis: For allegations for private misconduct, outright confession is better
than repeated denial in terms of the consequences of scandal._

_Hypothesis: For allegations for abuse of public office, ”lightning rod” strategies
and claims of principal-agent problems lessen the negative publicity._

The fifth task is to determine whether the design of the political institutions
matters. Clearly, recent corruption scandals in the USA, Italy and Russia followed
markedly different paths. In the USA, the Clintons were alleged to have taken illegal
loans for a Whitewater development project in Arkansas. The Yeltsin family in Russia
was rumored to have accepted bribes in exchange of rewarding a renovation contract to
the Swiss Company Mabetex. The Italian Prime minister Berlusconi was suspected of
bribing judges to cover up his tax evasions.

I propose that different political systems expose political blame differently. I will
construct an index of “political accountability” which measures the capacity of the
system to detect, expose and punish blame that has become public through scandal.
(Powell/Whitten 1993, Anderson 2000, Taagera 1993) “Political accountability” is bigger
if the electoral system is majoritarian, the government consists of one party, and the
judiciary is independent.

The electoral design was a key factor in exposing and attributing the political
blame in all three scandals. In majoritarian systems the public can attribute the blame
more clearly, because the government consists of one party and voting in the legislature is less ambiguous. This finding challenges the dominant view that the consensus model is more democratic than the majoritarian, because it represents the electorate more accurately. (Lijphart 1999) One hypothesis is that if the government consists of several parties, then the misdemeanor of a minister from one of these parties is less likely to cause notoriety for the whole government. The key point here is that it would be relatively harder for the electorate to allocate the blame, when the government is coalitional. Therefore the coalitional government’s popularity is likely to suffer less than that of single party governments in the face of an infamous scandal.

Electoral rules are also important in detecting blame because they structure the vote in the legislature in a less ambiguous fashion. The bipartisan US Congress was clearly divided along party lines on the issue of Whitewater. By contrast, the upper house of the Russian parliament, the Federation Council, chosen by partially majoritarian rules, postponed voting on accepting Yeltsin’s decision to lay off the Prosecutor general. It first tried to transfer the case to the Moscow criminal court, then asked the Constitutional court for clarifying its own jurisdiction. The spectacle protracted itself in the course of eight months until the initial question of culpability has long been forgotten in the never-ending series of accusations and counter-accusations.

The multi-party Italian parliament was just as ambiguous in its reaction to the bribery charges. McCarthy contends that: “the British electoral system would produce clearer political debates among the various socioeconomic actors and would lead them to firmer choices” (McCarthy 1997, p.179) Pasquino echoes this point by stating that: “The cumbersome, complex, ineffective form of government designed by the Italian
constitution…allowed the [government] to mediate among competing groups and interests, share responsibilities with their coalitional partners, and distribute political blame between them.” (Pasquino 1993, p.3)

The courts were also instrumental in exposing the blame in these scandals. In Italy, Berlusconi attempted to transfer his corruption case from the Milan court to another town, where he hoped to be able to exert more pressure on the judges. When this attempt failed, he forced the resignation of the main Milanese judge, Di Pietro. These developments testified to the relatively low capacity of the Italian judicial system to pursue blame. In Russia, Yeltsin used comparable strategies. The media featured a video showing the Yeltsin’s greatest foe, the prosecutor general Skuratov, in bed with three prostitutes. Yeltsin tried to dismiss the prosecutor three times on the grounds of moral culpability. All these developments come in sharp contrast with “Whitewater.” Clinton himself suggested the evocation of the Independent Council- an institution that was created by the Supreme Court during Watergate.

This discussion generates two hypotheses:

*Hypothesis: Scandals should produce greater impact on public opinion if the courts are independent.*

*Hypothesis: Scandals should produce a greater impact on public opinion in a two-party as opposed to a multi-party system.*

**Case Studies**

Italy, Great Britain, Germany, Russia and the USA make up a varied and fruitful case study selection. Different combinations of these five countries allow me to test the explanatory power of the three independent variables- economic performance, cultural
perceptions, and the actors’ strategies. If the type of reported misconduct matters, then cultural perceptions are important, and I need a set of countries with similar economic development, but different culture, such as the USA, Germany, and Great Britain. However, if cultural perceptions are irrelevant, and the state of the economy is a determining factor, I need countries with a similar scandal prone climate, but differing economic prosperity. The cases of Italy and Russia are a case in point. They are also instructive examples, because they both underwent a system transformation in the early 1990s. This will allow me to observe the full-fledged cycle of the change in the public attitudes. That also provides the reason why I chose to focus on the data in the last thirteen years.

To account for the causal mechanisms that propel scandals, one needs to look in-depth at their workings. How do scandals escalate into media frenzies? What is the minimum number of factors that need to be present for a scandal to occur? Once these determinants are present, what smaller factors facilitate the development of a media frenzy: an official investigation, a confession or a proof of misconduct, certain journalists, the setting of a parliamentary committee?

**The empirical puzzle: If the scandal is the same, then what about the blame game?**

Financial scandals involving the highest-ranking officials pepper contemporary political life. Italy and the USA in 1994, and Russia and Germany in 1999 all observed how their representatives fend off powerful corruption charges. The Clintons in the USA were alleged to have taken illegal loans for a Whitewater development project in Arkansas. The former chancellor Helmut Kohl of Germany supposedly accepted non-declared donations, which he had hidden in a secret Swiss bank account. The Yeltsin
family in Russia was rumored to have accepted bribes in exchange of rewarding a renovation contract to the Swiss Company Mabetex. The Italian Prime minister Berlusconi was suspected of bribing judges to cover up his tax evasions.

Although the scenarios were similar, as the charges involved comparable forms of financial abuse, and the political actors were equally high-ranking, these scandals played out differently: President Clinton remained in power and was subsequently reelected; Prime Minister Berlusconi’s government collapsed in 1994, but Berlusconi came back to politics with a vengeance in 2001; Yeltsin resigned unexpectedly on the millennium eve, but he insured the succession of a loyal secret service man; Chancellor Kohl resigned as an honorary chairman of the CDU, and his party still cannot recuperate from the heavy fines and the public stigma.

In the end of the day, the Italians, the Russians, the Germans and the Americans formed different opinions of the credibility of the scandalous politicians and the system as a whole. Both the job approval ratings of President Clinton and the public image of his persona remained intact during Watergate. (Gallup international poll) Kohl’s party, the Christian Democratic Union, was severely punished in the issuing elections. In Italy, the Census reported that the public mind has changed “sharply”, and that as a result of the scandal people think that “the political class is bent on suicide.” (McCarthy, p.191). In Russia, the public approval marked a sharp downturn on the eve of the scandal.

The important overarching question that these case studies raise is: Why do similar scandals have deleterious effects for the politicians in some countries, but left other politicians’ public image unscathed in other countries? I hope that my dissertation
will resolve this puzzle by comparing the effects of private, power, and financial scandals on public trust across five countries.

How did “blame visibility” and the politicians’ strategies affect the outcome in the four countries? In Russia, Yeltsin used aggressive strategies. He insisted that a video showing the prosecutor general with three prostitutes questions the moral culpability of the prosecutor general. Yeltsin tried to dismiss the prosecutor three times. The aggressive strategy was matched by low political visibility. The upper house of the Russian parliament, the Federation Council, postponed voting on accepting Yeltsin’s decision to lay off the Prosecutor general. It first tried to transfer the case to the Moscow criminal court, then asked the Constitutional court for clarifying its own jurisdiction. The spectacle protracted itself in the course of eight months until the initial question of culpability has long been forgotten in the never-ending series of accusations and counter-accusations. Yeltsin’s aggressive attacks, and the very diffused blame led to high credibility for Yeltsin, or at least for his successor, Putin, but lessened public support for democracy as a whole.

In Italy, Berlusconi attempted to transfer his corruption case from the Milan court to an unknown town nearby, where he hoped to be able to exert more pressure on the judges. When this attempt failed, he forced the resignation of the main Milanese judge. These developments testified to the relatively low capacity of the judicial system to pursue blame. Key to the low visibility of the blame was the fact that Berlusconi’s government was coalitional, and so it was unclear which of the three parties in power is responsible for the corruptibility of the prime minister. While the blame visibility in Italy was comparable to that in Russia, the odds played out differently here, since Berlusconi’s
strategies were relatively less successful in diverting the blame from his own persona than Yeltsin’s. Using abstract, religious language, Berlusconi almost bluffed by claiming that parliament could not overthrow him and declared the people’s representatives to be “anointed by the Lord” (La Repubblica, November 26 1994). Low visibility, and unsuccessful strategies led to low government and system popularity.

In the USA and Germany, the institutions were much more persistent in pursuing blame. Clinton was impeached in the Congress and tried in the Senate. An independent counsel was appointed from the very beginning. However, the strategies of Clinton and Kohl differed greatly. Clinton successfully maneuvered himself out of legal trouble by aggressive strategies and outright denial of any blame. Kohl initially kept silent, then he tried to reframe his blame by making the implausible claim that he accepted legal donations not for himself, but for his party. Not surprisingly, the Germans and the Americans saw the legitimacy of their system boosted, but the images of the alleged culprits suffered differently.

Field Study and Data Collection

In the end of the field research phase, I hope to produce a database, which includes about three hundred scandals for each country. For each scandal, I will define the type of offense and several additional characteristics. The table is enclosed. The research will cover the last thirteen years since the start of the democratization process of Italy and Russia.

As I pointed out above, the working definition of a political scandal here is “the intense political communication about a real or imagined effect” (Esser).² Keith and Dowding operationalize scandal by 1. getting a name list of all the people who served in

² For more definitions, see appendix 1.
the government, 2. consulting *The Times* index for references to the ministers, 3. Cross-referencing issues to other newspapers, *Hansar*, biographies, autobiographies, and other historical sources. (Keith/Dowding 1998) Dowding and Dewan introduce a variable measuring the saliency of a scandal. An issue receives 3 if it made the front page of *The Times*, or an editorial, or had substantial coverage on inside pages; 2 if the issue did not make the front page or an editorial, but had a reasonable coverage on inside pages; 1 if the issue had only a small coverage on the inside pages. For online articles, judgment is made on the amount of coverage. (Dewan/ Dowding, 2005, p.55) For the purposes of data collection, I intend to follow the same logic.

In addition to the saliency of the issue, it is important to account for the duration of the scandal. Is there a difference in the effects of reports of misconduct that have been on the inside pages for five, ten, or one hundred days? Another interesting question is whether, for example, an agglomeration of fifty reports regarding the same story of corruption gives affects the public more than fifty reports related to various instances of corruption. I would suggest that:

*Hypothesis:* *Multiple stories about the same misconduct may be more influential than the same number of stories about various instances about the similar type of misconduct.*

The dependent variable, “government popularity” is measured by Dowding and Dewan as the government’s percentage point lead over the main opposition party reported by Gallup from answers to the question “if there were a general election tomorrow, which party would you support?” Della Porta uses the Eurobarometer survey to monitor government popularity.
The categorization of the types of scandal includes nine categories: marital infidelity, sexual harassment, mismanagement of public funds, incompetence, bribery, nepotism, delayed reaction, and illegal action, verbal gaffe. Although the suggested categorization leaves room for some ambiguity, it still allows for less overlap between the categories than King’s typology of “sex, power and finance”, or Thumber’s categorization of “political (lying to the House of Commons, breaking of UN embargoes on arms sales), “financial” (cash for questions, the funding of political parties), and “sexual”. (King 1986, Thumber 2004)

Scandals can also be of a mixed type as sexual scandals often develop into cover-up scandals, or reveal some other, more profound misconduct. For example, the extramarital affair of the New Jersey Governor McGeevey led to the revelation that the governor has committed nepotism by appointing his lover to be the Homeland Security secretary without the necessary qualifications. Similarly, the love affair of the British Interior Minister David Blankett brought up the fact that he sped up the confirmation of the immigration status of his lover’s nanny. (Both officials resigned)

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The database will match the type of scandal with the following patterns of its occurrence: 1. Date when allegations broke out, 2. Days elapsed between the first news and the scandalizer’s public reaction, 3. Days elapsed between the scandal and the time of the offense, 4. Temporal proximity of the scandal to the nearest election, 5. Duration of scandal, 6. Origin of the scandalous allegations: TV news, TV shows, a newspaper, an election debate, parliament, a court trial, 7. Did the scandal get institutionalized: trial, parliamentary debates, independent Counsel, 8. Outcome of the scandal: dismissal, resignation, no reaction, 9. Did the nature of the allegation change from private/substantive to lying under oath?, 10. Position of the scandalizer (ranging from president, through Cabinet ministers, to parliamentary members), 11. Party affiliation of the person instigating the scandalous allegations, 12. Party affiliation of the person receiving the scandalous allegations, 13. Blame visibility, 14. Defensive of aggressive strategy of the actors.

I will test for the effects of “political accountability”, “frequency of scandals”, “type of scandal”, and “actors’ strategy” in the following equation:

\[ L_m = a + \alpha_1 ECON_m + \alpha_2 POL_m + \alpha_3 FrequencyScandals + \alpha_4 PoliticalAccountability + \alpha_5 PoliticalAccountability \times FrequencyScandals + \alpha_6 TypeSTRATEGY + \alpha_7 TypeSTRATEGY \times FrequencyScandals + \alpha_8 TypeScandal + \alpha_9 TypeScandal \times FrequencyScandal + \Sigma \]
where \( L_m \) is the government’s monthly approval rating. \( A \) is a constant. \( ECON_m \) is a vector for the economic effects of inflation, the exchange rate, unemployment, total revenue, and consumption during the month. \( POL_m \) is a vector of the political effects of the dummy variables for “Party in power” and “Proximity to election”. Political accountability is a vector for the independence of the courts, and the electoral system: Westminster type versus Multi-Party system.

**Four Theoretical Implications of the Research**

The research will provide the basis for raising, and hopefully resolving, several analytical questions of importance that goes far beyond the phenomenon of scandal. In fact, the end of ascertaining basic comparative facts about scandals will mark the beginning of a very wide research agenda. Having found out how much the rate of scandals has risen, and how that rate compares across several countries, then we must ponder the following queries:

First, why is it that the rate of scandals has increased so much in recent years? Do scandals indicate a change in the personalization of politics, where the governments have moved from a reactive mode of behavior to a proactive one involving the long-term use of promotional strategies (Thumber 1995)? Do politicians nowadays have more incentives and more zeal to engage in personal attacks? Has being personal and being negative become the new mode of conducting politics? Do repeated political onslaughts amount to a failure of leadership, or, conversely, to an astute Machiavellian way of amassing political power?
Second, has the role of the media changed from being “the fourth estate” to being an arena for power struggle (Waisbord 1994)? Are scandals mainly the result of an audience building strategy of the media? Does the media orchestrate scandals by overemphasizing certain issues and de-emphasizing others? The overemphasis on sexual scandals in Great Britain in comparison to the US may be largely due to the fact that US reporter consider low-brow stories unworthy of their attention. Sabato and Lichter point out that for the US “journalists, who felt uncomfortable pursuing … allegations of infidelity, Whitewater was the perfect scandal. High-minded. Financial. Dry.” (Sabato and Lichter 1994)

Third, what is the direction of the causality between scandals and public opinion? Do media reports about the government’s misconduct decrease public support for the government, or does negative public opinion about misconduct encourage the press and the politicians to start scandals? This is not only a theoretical query but also an important analytical question. If the public’s regard for the personality of the incumbents and their morals has increased, and this is what drives the spur of scandals, then scandals have frequented because of some fundamental change in the political system. The roots of the problem need to be traced to structural factors, such as a general problem of legitimacy in institutions in liberal democracies, particularly those where the parties that have been in power for many years have collapsed. (Castells 1997) One way to ascertain the direction of the relationship to monitor existing prior attitudes to immoral or corrupt behavior by consulting the World Value Survey. Another way to test this is to compare the frequency of scandals shortly before election times and incorporate this in a two-stage least square regression model.
Fourth, what is the relationship between the increased rate of scandalous revelations about the government, the loss of public support for it, and the general malaise of political trust and political activism? In general, what happens to the people who have been discouraged by media reports about the incumbents’ misconduct? Do they switch parties, or stop voting? Do scandals erode the public support for the government only, or does this negativity translate into cynicism towards the legitimacy of the whole system? (Ansolabehere/Iyengar 1997) Apathy is not just a psychological state of mind. It carries fundamental political significance as one could argue that cynicism affects citizens' compliance, such as voter turnout, obeying traffic laws, paying tax, and registering for military service. (Pharr/Putnam 2000)

**Appendix 1: Definitions of scandal in the literature:**

According to Thompson, scandal is:
1. An occurrence, which involves transgression of certain values, norms, or moral codes.
2. These values, norms, or moral codes are known to the public.
3. Some of the non-participants disapprove of the actions or events and may be offended by the transgression.
4. Some non-participants express their disapproval by publicly denouncing the actions or the events.
5. The disclosure and condemnation of the actions or events may damage the reputation of the individuals responsible for them. (Thompson, 1997, p.39)

King argues that: “Scandalous behavior is behavior that offends against a society’s ethical norms. It may be common, but it is disapproved of. Not all behavior that offends against a society’s norms, however, is usually thought of as scandalous. Scandals occupy a sort of middle ground of impropriety.” (King, 175)

Jimenez argues that “we can define political scandal as a public opinion reaction against a political agent regarded accountable for certain behavior that is perceived as an abuse of power or a betrayal of the social trust on which that agent’s authority rests” (Jaminez, p.1100)
Schudson quotes Thompson to indicate scandals to mean: “struggles over symbolic power, in which reputation and trust are at stake” (Schudson, p.1237)

Funk uses scandal as a: “shortcut for publicized behaviors by a politician that are in conflict with society’s moral standards” (Funk, p.2)

Lowi is more succinct: “Scandal is corruption revealed. Scandal is a breach of virtue exposed” (Lowi, p.vi)

Appendix 2: Types of elite’s tactics in responding to scandalous allegations, Astrid Schuetz, 1997

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assertive Elite Tactics</th>
<th>Offensive Tactics</th>
<th>Protective Tactics</th>
<th>Defensive Tactics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ingratiation</td>
<td>Derogate Competitors</td>
<td>Avoid public attention</td>
<td>Denial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplification</td>
<td>Find scapegoat</td>
<td>Minimal self-disclosure</td>
<td>Reframing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-promotion</td>
<td>Attack criticizer</td>
<td>Self-description</td>
<td>Dissociation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Display</td>
<td>Determine topic of discussion</td>
<td>Minimize social interaction</td>
<td>Justification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification</td>
<td>Remain silent</td>
<td>Passive but friendly interaction</td>
<td>Excuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concession, apologies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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