

Retraction Notice

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History

Expression of Concern:

- yes, date: yyyy-mm-dd
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Correction:

- yes, date: yyyy-mm-dd
 no

Comment:

The substantial portions of the text came from Dr. Thomas Sowers and Dr. James Nelson research, "The Economic Impact of Presidential Scandals" presented at the Southern Political Science Association's Annual Meeting in 2004.

This article has been retracted to straighten the academic record. In making this decision the Editorial Board follows [COPE's Retraction Guidelines](#). Aim is to promote the circulation of scientific research by offering an ideal research publication platform with due consideration of internationally accepted standards on publication ethics. The Editorial Board would like to extend its sincere apologies for any inconvenience this retraction may have caused.

The Timing of Presidential Scandals: The Dynamics of Economics, the Media and a Divided Government

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Several scholarly works have examined role of the media in the development of presidential scandals, as well as the impact of these scandals on presidential approval ratings. In this study, we develop a model for predicting presidential scandals by examining certain measurable characteristics of the political environments that have produced presidential scandals in the years 1948-2000. The findings link the occurrence of presidential scandals with the performance of the economy and the presence of divided government. A strong economy creates favorable conditions for scandals. Divided government is shown to be an almost necessary condition for a presidential scandal to occur.

Keywords: Political Scandals; Divided Government; American Politics; American Presidential Culture; Political Economy; Political Accountability; Economic Effects

Introduction

Presidential scandals are a recurring feature of the American political landscape. Not only do they capture the attention of the American public with intensity unparalleled by most other types of news coverage, they also are an important locus of conflict within American politics. Scandals can have major consequences for the distribution of political power (Williams, 2000). Analysts of the 2000 presidential election, for example, have suggested that George W. Bush's ascension to the office of the presidency was facilitated by Clinton's scandalous behavior (Renshon, 2002b). The importance of presidential scandals within the American political process has been established in a number of scholarly works. Renshon (2002a, 2002b) focused on the political impact of particular scandals, while other studies have examined the media "feeding frenzies" that often surround scandals (Sabato, 1991; Maurer, 1999). Finally, some studies have focused on the impact that scandals have on presidential approval ratings (Kagay, 1999; Fackler & Lin, 1995).

Determining the relationship between the emergence of scandals and certain measurable factors of the political environment, such as presidential approval ratings, will be the starting point for our analysis. Furthermore, we will argue that there is a systematic component to the timing of scandals, and that the occurrence of scandals is non-random and predictable. Through an examination of historical data surrounding three presidential scandals (Watergate, Iran-Contra, and White-water/Monica Lewinsky), we will show that scandals are likely to occur when there is a strong economy and divided government. We can in fact explain and predict scandals rather than treating them as random events. This implies that scandals derive less from the mere existence of scandalous behavior than from the usefulness of scandal within certain political environments. Presidential behavior tends to be scrutinized by political

opponents and featured in the media only in particular contexts. We attempt to explain why certain presidential behaviors "get legs"—in the public eye and as subjects of official investigations—while others are ignored.

Presidential Approval, Presidential Scandals, and the Economy

The perceived integrity of the president is one of the most important factors influencing presidential approval (Greene, 2001). The negative media coverage that is associated with presidential scandals brings the integrity of a president into question, predictably leading to lower approval ratings. A notable exception is President Clinton, whose approval ratings amidst the Whitewater and Lewinsky scandals were practically unscathed. Despite accusations against the Clintons, the general public did not see Whitewater as a scandalous event (Williams, 2000). Additionally, Clinton maintained high job approval rating during the Lewinsky scandal, though these high ratings may be partly attributed to the separation of feedback about personal values from evaluations of presidential job performance in surveys of the public (Greene, 2001). Clinton's approval ratings were supported by a strong economy throughout most of his term, which may have allowed people to separate his job performance and his personal integrity.

Beyond scandals, presidential approval ratings are influenced by many factors, the most important of which is the performance of the economy. Although the president's job performance is often evaluated based upon unrealistic standards that do not take into account the limitations of his legal authority to control the economy (Piffner, 1994), economic issues play a pivotal role in presidential approval ratings (Nadeau, Niemi, Fan, & Amato, 1999). Models that attempt to predict either

voter choice or approval ratings either assume a retrospective approach, which relates public perception of the president to the past performance of the economy, or a prospective approach, in opinion is correlated with expectations for the economy's future. Norpoth contrasted people's expectations about the future with the effect of previous economic conditions on the public's assessment of the president, finding the strongest correlations between approval ratings and the past state of the economy (Norpoth, 1996). The prospective approach also has a number of advocates, including Abramowitz (1985), Lockerbie (1992) and to some extent Lanoue (1994). In Abramowitz's (1985) research, predictions of future economic conditions were found to have significantly impacted people's assessments of President Reagan in 1982. Lanoue (1994) looks at the 1984 and 1988 presidential elections and finds some support for both the retrospective and the prospective approach.

Historic Cases

Throughout the course of American history scandals have originated from both public and private aspects of presidents' lives. Accusations of sexual improprieties date back to George Washington (Schultz, 2000) and allegations about abuse of power, such as the Teapot Dome scandal, have been standard in presidential politics. In order to focus our study, we have developed a concise definition of a presidential scandal for use in this analysis. For the purposes of this analysis, a presidential scandal is defined as any actual or perceived misconduct directly involving the president and prompting a congressional and/or independent counsel investigation. Furthermore, it is impossible for an event to be scandalous if few people know about it. The media's coverage of politics and this coverage play a critical role in a scandal's unfolding. The media's behavior during a scandal has been compared to a shark feeding frenzy by Sabato (1991) and more recently by Maurer (1999).¹ The scandals that meet these criteria are: Watergate, the Iran-Contra, and President Clinton's impeachment scandals. These cases were the only ones from 1948 to 2000 that included actual or perceived wrongdoing by a sitting president that prompted a congressional and/or independent counsel investigation (Schultz, 2000)—and all were accompanied by intensive media attention.

Watergate

In the early morning hours of June 17, 1972, five men were arrested for burglary inside the Democratic National Committee's headquarters. One of the men had been previously involved in the CIA's activities (Olson, 2003: 1, 44-45). Two days after the break-in, *The Washington Post* featured a story asserting that James McCord, who had been directly involved in the break-in, was CREEP's (Committee for the Re-election of the President) security coordinator and had also served the Republican National Committee. Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward reported on the burglary for *The Washington Post* and relentlessly pursued more information in order to discern what had actually occurred. Shortly thereafter, efforts to conceal the administration's and CREEP's involvement were initiated by White House aides. They gave official investigators false information and made evidence unavailable.

¹Maurer did find some important examples of scandals that were surprisingly not accompanied by a media feeding frenzy, such as the Paula Jones and Gennifer Flowers cases.

After seven convictions in connection to the Watergate break-in, the Select Committee on Presidential Campaign Activities was instituted by the Senate (Schultz, 2000). Nixon had covertly taped the conversations he had held with others within the Oval Office. A subpoena was issued by the special prosecutor, requesting that the tapes be handed over to him (Schultz, 2000). Nixon did not release the tapes and said that his actions were protected by executive privilege (Schultz, 2000). The debate over the tapes was eventually brought before the Supreme Court, which stated in an 8-0 ruling that Nixon was obligated to turn over all tapes that had been subpoenaed by the special prosecutor (Olson, 2003). The tapes later released on August 5 tied Nixon to the activities in question and served as incontrovertible evidence that the involvement of the administration in the break-in at Watergate had been concealed pursuant to Nixon's orders. Facing impending impeachment and a subsequent conviction, Richard M. Nixon voluntarily ceded the office of the presidency on August 9, 1974.

Iran-Contra

The Contras were a group of rebels opposed to the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. In compliance with President Reagan's directives, the Contras became the most important issue in US foreign policy in the western hemisphere by the end of 1981. President Reagan gave the CIA the authority to act in opposition to the Sandinistas through the support of paramilitary activity as well as political actions. False information was given to Congress by the president regarding this issue; President Reagan said that the money that he was attempting to obtain was going to be utilized to prevent arms trafficking in Central America. A law known as the Boland Amendment was later passed by Congress in December 1982 prohibiting both the Department of Defense and the CIA from funding the opposition to the Sandinista government. Afterward, the Boland Amendment was modified by Congress in order to make it unlawful for an American intelligence agency to give the Contras any form of aid that could be used to kill.

Due to the provisions of the Boland Amendment, the White House opted to utilize the resources of the National Security Council (NSC) to achieve its aims in Central America. The NSC is not obligated to answer to anyone other than the president and is not required to inform Congress of its activities. Colonel Oliver North was chosen by the administration to coordinate the activities that pertained to the Contras. When the Americans began selling arms directly to Iran without going through a third party, Oliver North became responsible for orchestrating these operations. The profits made from selling arms to Iran were used by North to fund the Contras.

A C-123 cargo plane that was later discovered to be property of Southern Air Transport was blown out of the Nicaraguan sky on October 5, 1986. It contained supplies that were to be delivered to the Contras (Schultz, 2000). Southern Air Transport was a false company in Miami whose name was used to cover CIA activities. More than a month after the crash, on November 22, a memo was found in the files of the NSC by officials of the Department of Justice that showed that money made by selling weapons to Iran was utilized to assist the Contras financially.

A congressional investigation followed and Lawrence Walsh was appointed to the position of independent counsel in order to investigate the matter. In the subsequent congressional investigation, during hearings that could be viewed on television

throughout the country, North claimed that he was given approval to act in the manner that he did by those at the top of the chain of command. In this case, because the NSC was involved, the person who was at the apex of the theoretical pyramid would have been President Reagan. Despite President Reagan's pivotal role in choosing to assist the Contras, it is still not known with any certainty whether he realized that the financial assistance that was given to the Contras was related to the sale of weapons to Iran.

Whitewater/Monica Lewinsky

The Clinton impeachment was the result of the tying together of three different scandals. Webster Hubbell, an attorney who had been a partner at the same firm as Hillary Clinton, was indicted in the Whitewater scandal and pleaded guilty, but did little to assist in the investigation despite assurances of his cooperation (Schultz, 2000). Senior White House aides set up consulting jobs for Hubbell, and he received more than \$700,000 as compensation for them (Schultz, 2000; Quirk, 2000). The payment for these jobs became a subject of investigation when Kenneth Starr, the independent counsel for the Whitewater investigation, looked into the possibility that the previously-mentioned jobs and the subsequent payment were set up for Hubbell in order to keep him from talking to prosecutors. Hubbell did not report more than half of the funds he received and faced charges of tax evasion as a result. A retainer of \$60,000 had been secured for Hubbell by Vernon Jordan, which brought Jordan into Ken Starr's investigation. In an unrelated lawsuit, many people were subpoenaed by Paula Jones's attorneys in order to try to demonstrate Clinton's behavioral patterns; the individuals subpoenaed included Monica Lewinsky, among others.

Starr became aware of the affair between Clinton and Lewinsky and on January 7, 1998 Monica Lewinsky signed an affidavit that falsely asserted that she did not have an affair with the President. Starr investigated whether this fabrication was prompted by Vernon Jordan or President Clinton. Starr later set out to substantiate the claims that the president had prompted Lewinsky to sign the affidavit and that the deposition provided by Clinton in the Paula Jones lawsuit was not entirely truthful.

On September 9, 1998, Starr delivered his highly-detailed report before the House of Representatives, claiming he had discovered some evidence that could warrant impeachment. On October 8, the House of Representatives decided to initiate an inquiry into the impeachment of the president. On November 19, hearings on the subject commenced. One month later, on December 19, two of the proposed articles of impeachment were approved by the House. These two articles accused Clinton of obstructing justice during his efforts to hide the affair he had engaged in with Monica Lewinsky and giving false testimony to a grand jury. January 7, 1999 marked the beginning of Clinton's trial in the Senate, which was presided over by Chief Justice William Rehnquist (Schultz, 2000). Clinton was not convicted of either of the charges that were specified in the articles of impeachment (Schultz, 2000; Gerhardt, 2000).

Although these scandals are unique events in US history, we believe that there are systemic components that make the occurrence of scandals more likely. In order for an incident to become a scandal, the media must report on it, the public must care about it, and other political actors must be willing to take action. We believe that there are specific environments in

which this is more likely to occur as well as environments that stifle scandals from ever reaching the point of an investigation. In the next section we will explore how scandals interact with the political process.

Modeling Presidential Approval and Scandal

The first objective of this research project is to measure the impact that scandals have on presidential approval. Presidential approval is measured monthly using the Gallup Poll data. In months with multiple polls the polls were averaged. If no poll was available, a value was interpolated for that month. We use Prais-Winsten regression models to control for first order serial correlation.² An Augmented Dickey Fuller statistic of -4.645 ($p < .01$) indicates that we can reject the hypothesis that there is a unit root in the time series and therefore there is no need to difference the dependent variable. We expect scandals to have a negative effect on presidential approval. Scandals should adversely affect the public's view of the president's integrity, which in turn should adversely impact his approval rating.

There are a number of important control variables that must be included in the model. The economy is critical when modeling presidential approval. We employ two measures in our analysis. The first measure we selected to gauge the state of the economy is the misery index, which is the sum of the rate of unemployment and the rate of inflation. The data that was used to calculate the misery index was obtained from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. The rate of inflation measures the decreasing value of the dollar, which decreases the purchasing power of American consumers, while the unemployment rate measures the percentage of the American workforce that is currently seeking employment. By combining these indicators of the state of the economy, the misery index helps us to discern more about the overall state of the US economy than either of its component statistics could if they were employed as separate independent variables. The effect of the misery index on presidential approval has already been examined in the past. Brace and Hinckley (1991) found that the misery index had a negative impact on presidential approval. In addition, many scholars have used unemployment and inflation separately to predict presidential approval.

The second measure of the economy that we employ in our analysis is the Consumer Sentiment Index (CSI). The CSI is compiled by the University of Michigan Consumer Center³, with quarterly data going back to 1960. The CSI is the public's perception of the future state of the economy. The CSI is composed of a large number of people's attitudes toward prospective economic conditions, which makes it an excellent indicator of whether the public expects the future state of the US economy to be prosperous or unfavorable. The CSI provides a nice counterpoint to the misery index, which is more concretely tied to the current economic conditions of the country. We will include the variables separately and together in our models.

In addition to the continual impact of the economy there are also unique events that can influence presidential approval. International conflict can have a major impact on a president's approval ratings. To control for this, we include a variable for each major war involving the United States from 1948 to 2000. This includes the Korean War, the Vietnam War and the Gulf

²See Beck (1991) for a discussion of time series issues associated with modeling presidential approval.

³<http://www.sca.isr.umich.edu>

War. We tried two different specifications of the variable. The first specification captures the impact of the initiation of conflict, with a dummy variable coded as 1 in the month in which the war was initiated. The second measure captures the impact of the entire conflict, with a dummy variable coded as 1 for every period during the war. The initiation variable was only significant in the case of the Gulf War.

The last variable measures the honeymoon effect that occurs when a new president is elected. Presidents typically enjoy high approval rating when they come into office. We therefore need to control for this short-term boost at the beginning of the term. We code the honeymoon period as lasting for the first three months in office. We also ran a model that included dummy variables for each administration. The results of the two models were consistent with one another, so we opted for the more parsimonious model.

The Timing of Scandals

Predicting presidential scandals entails two major problems. First, such scandals have typically been treated as random events; therefore it is necessary to develop a theory that can explain the occurrence of scandals as a function of systemic conditions. In order to do so, we focus primarily on the impact of divided government and the economy as the major explanatory variables. The second problem in studying scandals is that scandals are rare events. This can make it difficult to get significant leverage on the dependent variable. By the present moment, however, enough scandals have occurred that we can have significant success in developing a theory to explain and predict major presidential scandals.

Without media attention there are few political gains to be had from pursuing a scandal. Since the media is a highly competitive business we expect it to focus on issues that will keep the public's interest. This leads to our first expectation about the timing of scandals. We anticipate that scandals will occur during times of economic prosperity. When the economy is performing poorly, daily consumers of news would want to know whether the state of the national economy is improving or getting worse. When the economy is performing well, people would be less concerned about the state of the economy and would be more likely to watch news broadcasts for entertainment purposes. With a strong economy, media outlets would have ample time to devote to scandalous behavior. The opposition party also has a greater incentive to focus on a political scandal during times of economic prosperity in an attempt to decay the high levels of support for the president that is typically associated with a strong economy. Because of these two factors we hypothesize that stronger economic indicators will increase the likelihood of scandals.

The second major factor that influences the timing of scandals is the presence of divided government. Sinclair (2000) shows that divided government has increased the competition between the branches of government and intensified partisan politics. Conley (2003) also looks at the impact of divided government on the legislative process. More closely related to scandals, Mayhew (1991) explores the impact of divided government on Congressional investigations of the executive branch. He finds an almost constant state of investigation by Congress regardless of partisan divisions, while the House is more likely to initiate investigations during periods of divided government. We believe that divided government is an almost

necessary condition for these investigations to reach the point of scandal. During periods of divided government the investigations are more likely to take the fervid pitch that is needed to create public attention.

In addition to the state of the economy and divided government, many other factors have an effect upon the timing of presidential scandals. Presidential approval is sensitive to warfare and international conflict. While most people perceive war to be necessary in some cases, they often become less disposed toward believing that a war is worthwhile when the number of their fellow citizens dying on the battlefield escalates without significant progress in their efforts to defeat the enemy. Parker (1995) explored the impact that wars can have on public opinion, particularly focusing on the rallying effect that occurs early on in a conflict. The rallying effect is a temporary phenomenon with the approval benefits of the conflict dissipating over time.

Nonetheless, ongoing international conflict should make it more difficult for a scandal to take hold, as it pulls the public's attention away from the president's behavior as they focus on the ongoing conflict. This would give the media a disincentive to report on presidential scandals and a strong incentive to report on the progress of the war. For these reasons, we hypothesize that warfare will negatively affect the incidence of a presidential scandal. There are three major wars included in the time frame of the study. Korea and Vietnam are both included in the model. The Gulf War is dropped because of the short time span and the perfect correlation with the absence of scandal, which supports our expectation. We used data from the Militarized Interstate Dispute dataset⁴ to determine the beginning and end of each conflict. We also include a control variable for the honeymoon period to allow time for the president to develop a record. It is almost impossible for a scandal to occur before the president has established himself in the office.

We employed two different legit models to discern the effect of economic conditions on the incidence of presidential scandals. Both models included a lag of the presidential approval rating as an independent variable because the popularity of a president may affect how the media reports on a scandal. Our first model is designed to determine the effect of the current state of the economy on the incidence of a presidential scandal. In this model we include the misery index as the indicator of the economic conditions of the nation. Our second model includes the CSI to determine the impact that the prospective evaluation of the economy has on the timing of scandals. The CSI should be a strong determinant of the incidence of a presidential scandal because people's beliefs regarding the future state of the economy would dictate whether they watch the news for entertainment or information about the economy.

In both of these legit models, the beginning date of a presidential scandal is the first time the scandal is mentioned in network evening news broadcast. This point in time clearly marks the beginning of a presidential scandal because a scandal is not simply an act of misconduct; it also involves the tarnishing of the reputation of the accused that follows the public proclamation of alleged misdeeds. Without it being mentioned on network evening newscasts, we cannot be assured that the majority of the population is aware of the scandal. While people often obtain their news from other sources, network evening newscasts generally report on that interest the entire nation, which makes them a clear indicator of which news stories are

⁴<http://cow2.la.psu.edu/>

captivating the nation at any given time. An indicator based on *The New York Times* would likely be highly correlated because *Times* is a news leader, but we prefer to use a media source with less of an elite focus. The data used to determine the first time that a scandal was mentioned on an evening news broadcast was acquired from the Vanderbilt News Archives.⁵

Findings

We include two sets of models in our analysis. The first set of models illustrates the impact that scandals have on presidential approval. The second set of models attempts to predict the occurrence of scandals. **Table 1** shows the political costs of scandals to the president by looking at the impact that scandals have on presidential approval ratings. **Table 1** includes three models: the first uses the misery index, the second includes the CSI and the third includes both economic indicators. We were initially hesitant to include both variables because they are correlated at .826 which provides a strong indication that these variables are capturing the same concept and introduces the problem of multicollinearity into the models. Surprisingly, when both variables are included in the model (Model 3), both variables are statistically significant even with the high correlation between the variables. In each model we use Prais-Winsten

regression models to correct for first order autocorrelation.⁶ The Durbin-Watson statistics indicate that the transformations were successful in controlling the problem. All three models have significant F values and R² values ranges from .09 to .14.

There is nothing in this model that violates conventional wisdom. The impact of the economy is consistent across all three models. Whether the model includes a retrospective measure, such as the misery index, or the prospective measure, such as the CSI, the results are consistent; a poor economy results in lower presidential approval ratings. This is consistent with a myriad of earlier findings that have demonstrated the strong relationship between economics and presidential approval. In each model the presence of a scandal has a very strong negative impact on presidential approval. According to the model, on average, a scandal will drop presidential approval ratings by almost 10 percentage points. The public's dislike for a president that they perceive to be dishonest was reflected in these results.

Of the control variables, two are significant. The honeymoon period is significant in each of the three models. The honeymoon period has a small positive impact on presidential approval as expected. Divided government is significant in two of the three models and has a *p* value of .12 in the third. Divided government improves the popularity of the president. This may

Table 1.
Prais-Winsten regression predicting presidential approval.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	(S.E.)	<i>b</i>	(S.E.)	<i>b</i>	(S.E.)
Scandal	-9.12	(1.92) ^{***}	-9.02	(1.92) ^{***}	-9.60	(1.88) ^{***}
Misery Index	-1.03	(0.33) ^{***}			-1.14	(0.39) ^{***}
CSI			0.26	(0.07) ^{***}	0.21	(0.07) ^{***}
Honeymoon Period	2.28	(0.93) ^{**}	2.06	(1.06) [*]	1.92	(1.06) [*]
Divided Government	4.00	(1.62) ^{**}	2.92	(1.89)	3.09	(1.82) [*]
Korean War	-4.12	(3.07)				
Vietnam War	0.52	(2.78)	0.50	(2.74)	-1.01	(2.62)
Gulf War (1990-1991)	0.70	(3.22)	-0.06	(3.25)	0.70	(3.23)
Constant	64.53	(3.97) ^{***}	32.86	(6.16) ^{***}	49.00	(8.53) ^{***}
rho	0.91		0.90		0.88	
Num. of Obs.	624		492		492	
F	10.17	^{***}	11.69	^{***}	12.3	^{***}
Adj. R ²	0.09		0.12		0.14	
Durbin-Watson						
Original	0.26		0.31		0.30	
Transformed	1.98		2.04		2.01	

Note: ^{*}*p* < .1; ^{**}*p* < .05; ^{***}*p* < .01.

⁵<http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/>

⁶We also ran models with lags of the dependent variable instead of a Prais-Winsten transformation. The statistical significance of all theoretical variables was consistent across models.

be a result of higher expectations from a unified government or from the ability of the president to blame the other party controlling Congress during periods of divided government. Surprisingly, the wars included in the model are not significant. This may have been a result in how the wars were coded. The public's awareness and reaction to the conflict may change over time resulting in the insignificant findings. For example, Norpoth (1996) divides the Gulf War into three periods and finds that only the last period has a statistically significant impact on approval.

The models in **Table 1** indicate that scandals adversely affect presidential approval ratings. However, the more interesting question concerns whether or not we can predict the occurrence of scandals. We believe that there is a non-random component in the timing of scandals, with the primary predictors of scandals being divided government and a strong economy. **Table 2** presents three models that are once again divided by economic indicator. Unlike in **Table 1**, the CSI is insignificant in Model 3. There is a very good chance this is due to the correlation between the CSI and the misery index. Because of this we will focus on Models 1 and 2 rather than Model 3. We initially included dummy variables for each war that occurred during the time span of our study. The Korean War and the Gulf War perfectly predicted the absence of scandal and dropped out of the model during estimation, while Vietnam was negative as expected. This supports our argument that wars should greatly reduce the likelihood of scandals.

In all three models divided government has a significant impact on the likelihood of a scandal. In fact, the impact is so powerful it is almost a necessary condition for scandals. During periods of unified government partisan politics is likely to intervene to prevent the competition between Congress and the president from resulting in scandals. During periods of divided government there is no allegiance between the president and Congress that would prevent Congress from attacking the president. In addition, divided government also makes it politically appealing to attack the president and focus on scandalous behavior.

When we add economics into the equation we get a clear picture of the type of environment that will encourage scandals. In Model 1 the misery index has a negative relationship to the occurrence of scandals. This means that the worse the economy performs the less likely it is that a scandal will occur. **Figure 1** shows the predicted probability of a scandal from the lowest misery index included in the sample to the highest misery index included. Two sets of probabilities were calculated: the first with divided government and the second with unified government. When there is unified government the probability of a scandal never reaches higher than 15% even in the best economic times. During periods of divided government the likelihood of a scandal exceeds 50% with a misery index of 8.4%. As the misery index falls and the economy performs better the likelihood of a scandal steadily increases to near 90% at the strongest economic period in our study.

Model 2 in **Table 2** yields similar results to Model 1. The only difference in the model is the inclusion of the CSI rather than the misery index. It should be noted that the CSI and misery index are coded in opposite directions. This means that a positive coefficient for the CSI variable is comparable to a negative coefficient for the misery index variable. The stronger the CSI the more likely a scandal will occur. The effect of divided government is not as powerful in this case as in Model 1, but divided government does significantly increase the likelihood of a scandal. **Figure 2** shows the predicted probabilities. Once again we only see a high likelihood of scandals when there is a strong economy. Even the presence of divided government does not create a high likelihood of scandals when the economy is performing very poorly.

Two control variables were statistically significant. The impact of these variables on the predicted probability of a scandal can be seen in **Table 3**. The lag of the presidential approval rating had a negative effect on the incidence of a presidential scandal in all three models. Extremely popular presidents are less likely to be attacked than an unpopular president. We used the lag of approval to make sure that the approval rating preceded the scandal. The probabilities in **Table 3** are calculated

Table 2.
 Logit models predicting presidential scandals.

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	(S.E.)	<i>b</i>	(S.E.)	<i>b</i>	(S.E.)
Misery Index	-0.53	(0.07)***			-1.01	(0.13)***
CSI			0.14	(0.02)***	0.01	(0.02)
Divided	3.18	(0.44)***	1.76	(0.36)***	3.33	(0.49)***
Lag of Approval	-0.15	(0.02)***	-0.11	(0.02)***	-0.17	(0.02)***
Honeymoon	0.44	(0.55)	-0.33	(0.56)	-0.15	(0.66)
Vietnam War	-1.89	(0.45)***	-2.02	(0.46)***	-3.54	(0.53)***
Constant	9.39	(1.32)***	-9.23	(1.21)***	14.82	(2.97)***
Num. of Obs.	576		483		483	

χ^2	215.64	***	216.39	***	322.37	***
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Note: * $p < .1$; ** $p < .05$; *** $p < .01$.

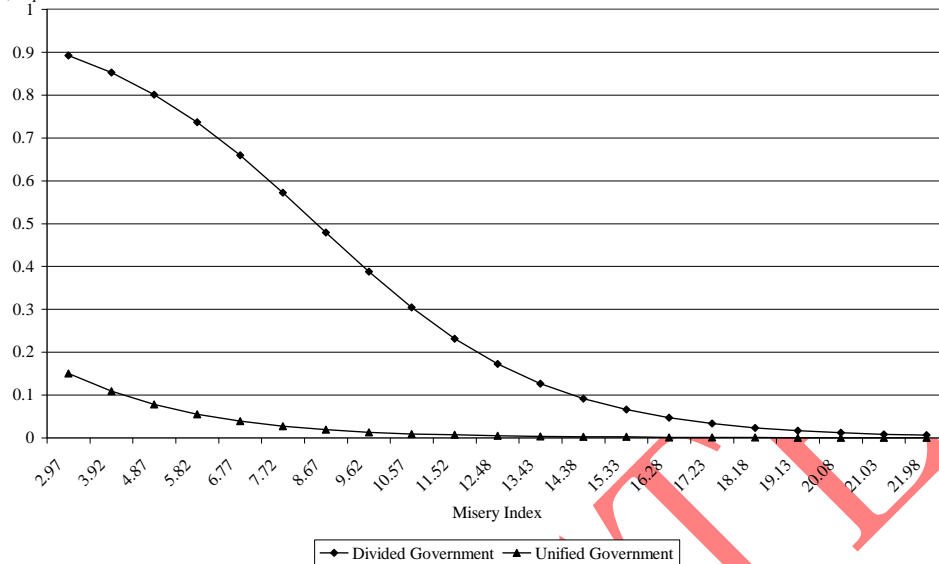


Figure 1.
Probability of scandal by misery index.

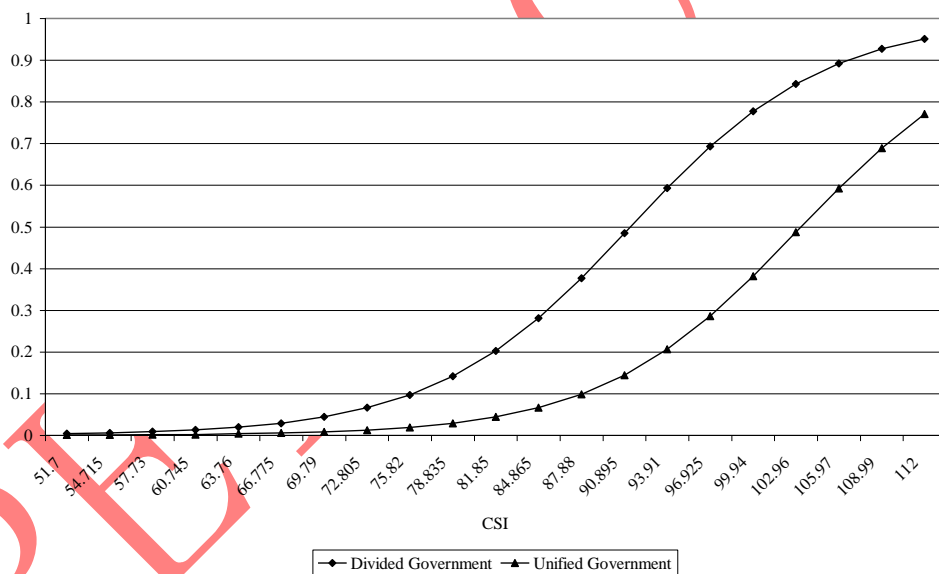


Figure 2.
Probability of scandal by CSI.

with all other variables set at their mean or modal value. This means that the probabilities shown are for divided government. During periods of unified government the probability of scandal is much lower regardless of approval rating.

The Vietnam War had a statistically significant negative effect on the incidence of a presidential scandal in all three models. The Vietnam War reduced the probability of a scandal by at least 30% in each model. It is possible that the public's interest in information about the ongoing war precluded the media from seeking out and reporting on presidential scandals during the Vietnam War. It should be noted that we cannot make generalizations about the impact of war on the occurrence of scandals

since we only have one event to base our conclusions on. That being said there were no political scandals during Korea, Vietnam, or the Gulf War and there does not appear to be any scandals during the second Gulf War under George W. Bush.

The above results indicate that scandals are not entirely random events. Certain political environments make scandals more likely to occur. Divided government has the strongest impact. In some models, it was an almost necessary condition for a scandal to occur. This indicates that partisan politics is still more important than competition between institutions. It also appears that partisan conflict is as important to scandals as the act of wrongdoing itself. Economics is also a strong indicator of

scandals with a strong economy providing a fertile environment for scandals to develop. A weak economy stifles scandals by most likely focusing the attention of politicians and the public on economic concerns. These findings provide the foundation for moving beyond treating scandals as random events and the motivation to more closely examine the political landscape

Table 3.

Predicted probabilities for control variables.

	Model 1—Misery Index	Model 2—CSI
Vietnam War	0.14	0.08
No War	0.39	0.38
Lag of Approval		
High	0.16	0.15
Mean	0.39	0.38
Low	0.69	0.68

from which scandals are born.

Conclusion

Throughout this analysis, we have examined the various factors that contribute to fluctuations in both the presidential approval rating and the incidence of presidential scandals. Supporting earlier findings, we illustrated that the incidence of scandals and poor economic conditions negatively impacted the approval rating of the president while the honeymoon period and divided government tend to improve approval ratings. The public favors presidents when economic indicators are positive. Scandals greatly reduce approval ratings, which makes them attractive weapons for political adversaries.

Presidential scandals do not appear to be completely random. Poor economic conditions and the Vietnam War were factors that greatly reduced the likelihood of a scandal. It is probable that, when the state of the American economy is favorable and people stop worrying about their own job security, or for the safety of their fellow citizens who are serving in combat, they follow coverage of presidential scandals. The prevalence of these conditions encourages Americans to watch the news for entertainment purposes. The media responds to this preference by offering the public coverage of presidential scandals, a subject which people find to be highly entertaining.

To see scandals as a structural component of the American political landscape, rather than as random events following from the actions of corrupt individuals, may seem to depend on the controversial assumption that there are always scandalous activities that could be exposed at any time. However, we only need the perception of inappropriate behavior, not actual wrongdoing; as Mayhew (1991) points out, Congress is almost always investigating some aspect of the executive branch. The strongest argument for our assertions about the non-random nature of presidential scandals is in the models, which clearly indicate that scandals are likely to emerge in particular political environments.

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