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THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF SCANDAL IN CONGRESSIONAL ELECTIONS

George C. Landrith*

Congressional elections are affected by many factors, such as incumbency, personal appeal, issues, party affiliation and scandals. These are not the only factors influencing Congressional elections, but they are among the most important. Possibly the least understood of these factors is scandal. Because very little is known or published about how scandals affect Congressional elections, I became interested in this topic.

Since scandals occur relatively seldom in Congressional elections, they do not often play a major role in the electoral outcome. When scandals do occur, however, and become publicized, they are bound to have some type of effect on the election. Keeping this in mind, my research question became, "What are the political consequences of scandals in Congressional elections?"

In order to answer this question, I had to do original research since I found very little published information. First, I formulated a questionnaire and a cover letter. The cover letter was used to generally explain and introduce my topic to the respondents while the questionnaire was used to gather information upon

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which I could base my study. Second, I mailed the cover letter and questionnaire to about thirty different people. These people included opponents of former Congressmen involved in scandals, newspaper writers, political pollsters, state party leaders, and the heads of national Congressional Election Committees. Third, I later telephoned the people to whom I had written, hoping to interview them. After several weeks of telephoning, I had interviewed only sixteen of the thirty. Many of the respondents were either too busy or were uncomfortable with the topic since it was an election year and scandals are a touchy subject at such times.

Through these sixteen interviews, however, I was able to collect and compile some rather interesting information. In order to answer my research question, "What are the political consequences of scandals in Congressional elections?" I had to break the topic down into the following sub-questions.

1) How do voters, campaign contributors, and the media rank different scandals in terms of seriousness?

2) Do certain regional areas view any type of scandal either more or less seriously than the nation as a whole?

3) How does the timing of a scandal, in relation to election day, affect the media, the voters, and the campaign contributors?

4) What makes a scandal so serious?

5) How do candidates, party organizations, Congress, the media, and opponents deal with scandals?
6) Is there an increase in media attention to scandals? If so, why?

These sub-questions are taken from the questionnaire that I used in my research. I will deal with each sub-question separately. After answering each individual question, I will then correlate the sub-questions through a conclusion.

Seriousness of Different Scandals

Voters

In an effort to discover which scandals were of the most concern to voters, I asked the respondents, "How would you rank the following scandals in terms of importance to voters using a zero-to-ten scale (0 = not at all serious, 10 = very serious)?" I then listed six categories of scandals: heterosexual promiscuity, graft, homosexuality, misuse of funds, drugs, and other. On the average, misuse of funds was the most serious scandal with an average rating of 8.2. Graft and homosexuality were second and third with a rating of 7.6 and 7.4 respectively. Drugs and heterosexual promiscuity were the least serious scandals scoring 7.2 and 5.2 respectively. No one ever responded to "other," even though I specifically mentioned it. Graph 1 depicts this information well.

There was a general consensus among the respondents concerning misuse of funds, graft, and drugs. Most of the respondents ranked these scandals very similarly to the average ranking. In other words, few respondents gave rankings that differed significantly from the average. The reason for this general consensus on the misuse of funds, graft, and drugs is that they are perceived almost universally by voters as affecting a Congressman's or Senator's ability
to perform as a legislator. For voters, these types of scandals are very difficult to rationalize by saying, "Well, it's just his personal life style." The fact is that in our society bribes and misuse of funds are not usually considered "personal life styles."

In comparison, however, homosexuality and heterosexual promiscuity lacked a consensus. Some respondents ranked them as eights, nines, or tens. Others ranked them as zeros, ones, or twos, and still others ranked them somewhere in between zero and ten. The reason for this
diversity of opinion can be easily explained. Some voters feel that homosexuality or heterosexual promiscuity are personal matters and do not affect a Congressman's or Senator's performance as a legislator any more than the brand of facial tissue he uses would. However, other voters feel that it is unacceptable for a legislator to be involved in such things because it shows a lack of moral character which they feel is needed by our lawmakers. As a result of these widely divergent viewpoints, the average rankings given to homosexuality and heterosexual promiscuity were very different from the individual responses, since the individual responses tended to be polarized toward either a ranking of ten or zero.

Campaign Contributors

When the respondents were asked to rank the importance of different scandals to campaign contributors, the result changed somewhat. Misuse of funds was still the most significant scandal, scoring 6.9. Graft and homosexuality tied for the second most significant scandal, each scoring 6.5. Drugs followed close behind with a score of 6.4. Lastly, heterosexual promiscuity was the least significant scandal, averaging only 3.5. These facts are illustrated most clearly in Graph 2.

Once again, there was a basic consensus on misuse of funds, graft, and drugs. Surprisingly, there was more agreement on the importance of homosexuality among campaign contributors than among voters. While there was still some disparity on the importance of homosexuality, the disparity was less polarized than with voters. In other words, the individual responses were much closer to the average with the campaign contributors than with the voters.
It is interesting to note that campaign contributors viewed all the scandals except heterosexual promiscuity as relatively similar in their level of seriousness. Over half of the respondents agreed on an explanation of this phenomenon. First, the campaign contributor tends to view his or her contribution to a candidate as a "bet" or an "investment." As a result, any scandal that may damage or lessen a candidate's chances for election will likely influence the contributor's decision on whether or not to support the candidate. Since voters ranked misuse of funds, graft, homosexuality, and drugs as relatively serious scandals but did not view
heterosexual promiscuity as a very serious scandal, it seems logical that campaign contributors with an "investment" or "bet" in mind, view misuse of funds, graft, homosexuality and drugs as relatively serious scandals, while they view heterosexual promiscuity as much less serious.

Media

When the respondents were asked to rank the several scandals according to the media's view of seriousness, the results changed once again. First of all, the three most significant scandals were misuse of funds, scoring 9.4, with graft and drugs closely behind at 9.1 each. Following somewhat more distantly were homosexuality and heterosexual promiscuity averaging 7.9 and 7.6 respectively. Graph 3 illustrates the findings.

A prominent political editor for a large newspaper said that the media views misuse of funds, graft, and drugs as similar in relative seriousness or importance. He stated that these sorts of scandals are widely believed to affect a legislator's performance in office and are, therefore, extremely relevant news items. The scandals involving heterosexual promiscuity or homosexuality are not as clearly linked to performance in office and, therefore, do not usually get quite as much attention. The editor did go on to say, however, that all scandals are relevant to the media. As a result, all scandals will receive some media coverage. The difference is that very serious scandals involving the misuse of funds, graft, and drugs are given more attention and are treated more negatively than less serious scandals like homosexuality or heterosexual promiscuity.
Comparison of Voter, Campaign Contributor, and Media

When comparing the importance of scandals to voters with their importance to campaign contributors and the media, two points become obvious: 1) campaign contributors view all scandals as substantially less important than both voters and the media, and 2) the media views scandals as substantially more important than both voters and campaign contributors. The first point is demonstrated by the fact that campaign contributors ranked misuse of funds at 6.9 while the voters' ranking was 8.2 and the media ranked it 9.4. Likewise, drugs, homosexuality, and
heterosexual promiscuity were all ranked as less important to campaign contributors than to either voters or the media. The second point is demonstrated by the media's ranking graft at 9.1 while voters and campaign contributors ranked it only 7.6 and 6.5 respectively. Likewise, the media ranked drugs as 9.1, but voters felt it was only 7.6 and campaign contributors felt it only merited a 6.5. Heterosexual promiscuity, misuse of funds, and homosexuality followed this same trend. These two points are illustrated clearly by Graph 4.

Graph 4: A Comparison of Voters', Campaign Contributors', and the Media's Ranking of Scandals
As shown in Graph 4, campaign contributors consistently viewed all the scandals as less serious than did either voters or the media. When I asked the respondents why campaign contributors consider scandals less serious than do voters or the media, the most frequent answer was that the campaign contributors view the candidates and elections as "investments" or "bets" and as a result, the scandal itself is not terribly important. What is important is whether or not a scandal makes a candidate a "poor investment" or a "bad risk." If the scandal makes the candidate a "poor investment" or a "bad risk," then the campaign contributor would feel that the scandal is serious. However, if the scandal does not appear to damage the candidate's chance of victory in the election, then to the campaign contributor, the scandal is not of great importance.

A somewhat less skeptical respondent explained that campaign contributors are issue voters and thus they base their support or nonsupport of a candidate upon the issues and not his personal characteristics. Several of the respondents who offered this explanation felt that campaign contributors were more politically astute or aware. This political awareness allows the campaign contributors to react less emotionally to a scandal than the average voter would.

As Graph 4 clearly shows, the media considers all of the scandals more serious than either the voters or the campaign contributors. From my research, I was able to derive two explanations for this: 1) the media sees itself as a "watchdog" of government and fulfilling this role of "watchdog" requires the media to view scandals very seriously, and 2) scandals are interesting news; thus, scandals sell newspapers. I will briefly touch upon these two explanations.
First of all, the "watchdog" role of the media means that the media exposes or gives attention to scandals because the media feels that it has a responsibility to present the facts to the public. One point that I want to make clear is that the personal opinions of the members of the media about scandals did not seem to differ significantly from those of any of the other groups of people I interviewed. However, because of their professional responsibility to be "watchdogs," the members of the media feel an obligation or duty to present the facts about the scandals even if they personally think it is trivial. Thus, the media ranks almost all scandals as relatively serious because it feels that the public has the right to decide what is trivial and what is important. I think that this "watchdog" explanation is reasonable; however, it is only part of the answer.

The second explanation states that scandals sell papers or improve ratings; therefore, the media focuses on scandals. This view is more cynical, but it has some truth to it. It has been said that when a dog bites a man, it is not news, but when a man bites a dog, it is news. This saying is analogous to scandals and the news. For example, there are thousands of homosexuals in the United States; yet, in recent months, Representative Studds (D-Massachusetts) has received a lot of attention in the press while few other homosexuals are ever featured in the headlines. In short, when elected officials are involved in "questionable" activities or scandals, the public is interested and people buy the paper and watch the news that tells all of the details of the scandal. Once again, however, this explanation is only partly useful because other factors may be involved.

Another very important factor will be covered in a later section of this paper entitled
"Greater Media Attention." In this section I will give a third explanation of why the media ranks all scandals more seriously than voters or campaign contributors.

**Regional Differences**

In order to determine if the seriousness of scandals varied throughout the United States by region, I asked, "Are there some parts of the country that may consider one or more of these scandals either less or more serious than the nation as a whole?" Every respondent felt that there was a great deal of variance within the country.

First of all, it was generally believed that all five scandals (misuse of funds, graft, homosexuality, drugs, and heterosexual promiscuity) are viewed as more serious in three major areas: 1) rural areas such as the Midwest, 2) the South, and 3) highly religious areas such as the Bible Belt and Utah. I realize that these three categories can be overlapped. For example, much of the South is rural and much of the South is considered a part of the Bible Belt. However, even though these three categories overlap, they are not necessarily redundant. For example, Richmond, Virginia, or Atlanta, Georgia, are Southern, nonrural cities, but they were believed by the respondents to view all of the scandals as more serious than most cities in the Northeast. I will offer explanations as to why these three areas might consider the scandals more serious than the nation as a whole.

First, rural areas, such as the Midwest or parts of the South, might consider scandals to be more serious than the nation as a whole because rural areas tend to be more homogeneous. By definition, a homogeneous society's population is
relatively uniform or similar in its characteristics. This means the people are educated similarly, hold similar opinions, have similar social and economic backgrounds, etc. This lack of diversity in a homogeneous society can lead to intolerance toward people and toward ideas that are different or unfamiliar. As a result of this lack of tolerance, scandals can be viewed very seriously in a homogeneous society. Parts of the Midwest and the South could be considered relatively homogeneous, thus accounting partially for scandals being seen as serious in these areas.

Second, the South might consider these scandals more serious because it tends to be a more traditional society. The rules produced by a traditional society are rules that have been passed from generation to generation and continued for so long that they almost carry the force of law. Since the rules have been in force for a long period of time, they are likely to be morally conservative rules or rules that may be considered "old fashioned" in today's society. When these rules are broken the offense is not taken lightly or quickly forgotten. In contrast, a more modern society (or at least a nontraditional one) seems to have fewer and less strict rules for members of society. Since a traditional society has more strict rules than a modern society, it is not too difficult to understand why an area such as the South—which tends to be traditional—may view scandals more seriously.

Third, the highly religious areas like Utah may view the scandals more seriously because scandals violate moral codes that are considered important in almost all religions. For example, heterosexual promiscuity would be very serious in Utah, as former Congressman Howe (D-Utah), who attempted to solicit two prostitutes on the day after he had won the Democratic primary, could attest. Conversely, the same scandal may
not be very serious at all in New York City where it may not be an unusual happening and where those who practice religion are not as highly concentrated. In short, a scandal in a highly religious area would be interpreted by voters as a sign of moral weakness and compromising standards, which is not usually tolerable to the very religious. Another factor to be considered in religious areas is that they tend to be more traditional and more homogeneous than areas which are not noted as "religious regions."

On the other hand, various scandals were perceived to be less serious in large cities and Northeast. Scandals such as graft or misuse of funds are less serious in large unionized cities like Chicago or Pittsburg. In New York, Boston, and San Francisco, homosexuality is less serious. Likewise, drugs are less serious in New York and California. Finally, heterosexual promiscuity is less serious in almost all large cities, in the Northeast, and in California.

These scandals are considered to be less serious in the large cities and the Northeast because they are more common there. For example, in a unionized town with big business, graft is perceived to be more common and therefore it is less shocking or serious. Likewise, homosexuality is more common in New York and San Francisco than in other areas; thus, it is not viewed as seriously. In short, when a scandal occurs more frequently, its impact and seriousness are lessened. Another factor is that the Northeast, large cities, and California are very heterogeneous. Diversity is extreme in these areas. The people in these areas are willing to accept differences, including scandal. This does not mean that they are amoral. It simply means that they are more tolerant of politicians who are involved in scandals. In short, heterogeneity encourages more tolerance, thus explaining why
scandals are viewed less seriously or more tolerantly in the Northeast, large cities, and California.

**Timing of Scandal**

My next goal was to determine if the timing of a scandal in relation to the election affects its importance to the following groups of people: 1) voters, 2) campaign contributors, 3) opponents of the scandalous candidates, and 4) the media. While the timing of a scandal impacts all four of these groups, the timing has various effects on each of them.

**Voters**

The closer a scandal is to the election, the more seriously it is viewed by the voters. In other words, a scandal that occurs a few weeks before the election is more damaging to a candidate than a scandal that occurs many months before the election. When a scandal occurs right before an election, it is difficult for the candidate to rebound from it. There is little time for the "scandalous" candidate to establish his innocence or to redeem his character. Likewise, a scandal that happens close to an election gets more coverage (mostly negative) than one that occurs a year or two before elections.

A second reason scandals that occur close to elections are considered more serious by voters is the short memory of voters. One leader of the Democratic party said that voters, on the whole, have a limited ability to remember scandals after six months. He referred to this as a "six-month window." There was a general consensus among the respondents that the voters tend to forget or maybe even forgive after enough time has passed. As a result, if a scandal must hit, the best time
would be the December or January right after the election. This would give Congressmen and Senators about two to six years respectively to prove that they are capable legislators despite the scandal, or give the voters enough time to forget.

Campaign Contributors

The campaign contributors are less affected by the timing of a scandal but they are affected nonetheless. If the scandal occurs close to the election, the candidate already has the contributor's money; thus, in one sense, a scandal late in a candidate's campaign theoretically should not drastically hurt his fund raising. However, it could hurt support for subsequent reelection efforts, so a scandal should never be taken lightly. Perhaps more important, however, is the fact that the campaign contributors ranked all five scandals, from misuse of funds to heterosexual promiscuity, as less serious than the voters and the media ranked them. This would seem to indicate that a scandal may not affect a campaign contributor's support nearly as much as it would erode voter support. As explained earlier, campaign contributors look at their contributions as "investments." Secondly, campaign contributors could be more issue conscious and less interested in scandals. For these reasons, campaign contributors are the least affected by the timing of a scandal.

Opponents

One man's loss is another man's gain. For this reason, the political opponent of a scandalous candidate is bound to benefit from his opponent's scandal. The more serious the scandal or the closer it occurs to election day, the better it is for the opponent. A scandal that occurs a year or more before elections may have only a small
benefit for the opponent. The longer time period allows voters to either forgive or forget while allowing the candidate to prove his capabilities as a legislator.

Media

The media's reaction to the timing of a scandal surfaces almost exclusively in the amount of attention given to it. For example, a scandal that occurs two weeks before an election will be a big news item until after the election. This means that the scandal will be front-page news for over two weeks. However, if the same scandal occurred over a year before the election, it would die down after a few days. Even if the scandal remained a news item for a couple of weeks, it would not be the "top story." This means that a scandal occurring long before election time will not be in the news as long, nor will it get the top billing as long nor be treated as negatively as a scandal occurring near an election. In short, an election-time scandal is played up and given special attention by the media, whereas the nonelection-time scandal gets relatively little exposure.

Seriousness of the Act

My next goal was to find out what aspect of a scandal makes it so serious. I particularly wanted to know if voters and campaign contributors differed in what made a scandalous act serious. There was no particular answer that was given most frequently by either voters or campaign contributors. When the information gathered from this question is examined in conjunction with the other information that I obtained from my questionnaire, I feel that I can offer some good explanations to answer the question:
What makes a "scandalous" act so serious to the voters and campaign contributors?

Voters

All of my interviews indicated to some extent that there are so many different factors that could explain why a scandalous act is serious that it would be difficult to pinpoint one specific item. Nevertheless, one theme seemed to be basic to all of the responses. What makes scandals so serious to voters is that they feel as though their trust was betrayed. As a political editor for a newspaper in Virginia explained, voters elect a representative that they think they can trust. Many times a scandal serves to tell voters, "See, you cannot trust him." The reason voters feel that their trust has been betrayed is that a candidate usually tries to create an image of honesty, integrity, and competence. But when voters see scandals, they begin to question the candidate's image of honesty and integrity. Voters feel as though their trust was taken advantage of by the "scandalous" candidate.

In other cases, scandals cause voters to feel that candidates have grossly misrepresented themselves. For example, if a candidate campaigns on values such as family, preservation of the morals of society, etc., the voters expect the candidate to live a life that is in keeping with his campaign ideals. If a candidate is involved in a scandal like heterosexual promiscuity or homosexuality, the voters feel the candidate is a hypocrite and that he grossly misrepresented himself. The scandal involving Representative Robert Bauman (R-Maryland) illustrates this point vividly. He presented himself as a strong conservative against homosexuality and all other "vices of our liberal society." Then he was caught involved in a homosexual act on Capitol Hill. This made him look hypocritical and
dishonest. Because he grossly misrepresented his character, he lost the support of his constituents.

Another factor that helps explain what makes a scandal so serious was given by Patrick Shea when he said that a scandal "rips at the moral fiber" of society. The voters many times feel as though their values are being attacked by the scandal. This attitude makes voters defensive and feel as though they must protect the "moral fiber" of society by voting out the candidate involved in the scandal.

The feelings of betrayed trust, hypocrisy, gross misrepresentation of character, and the "ripping of the moral fiber" of society were all central themes in explaining what makes a scandal so serious to voters.

Campaign Contributors

The campaign contributors vary only slightly from the voters in this aspect. As I already explained, campaign contributors do not view scandals as seriously as voters. However, to the degree that campaign contributors do view scandals as serious, one may say that the above-mentioned betrayed trust, hypocrisy, gross misrepresentation of character, and the "ripping of the moral fiber" of society are all important factors.

However, for campaign contributors another important factor in explaining what makes a scandal so serious stems again from the idea that a contribution is viewed as an "investment." For campaign contributors, a scandalous act becomes more serious when it hurts the candidate's chance for reelection. In other words, if the voters seem to be outraged by the scandal then campaign contributors also worry more about it because
their "investment" may not work out. On the other hand, when voters seem to be relatively unaffected by a scandal, then the contributors feel like their investment is safe; thus, the contributor is less troubled by the scandal.

Jail Sentence

The second part of this question asked if a jail sentence made a scandal even more damaging. The universal answer was "yes." Richard Ciccone described a jail sentence as "the kiss of death." The main reason the jail sentence is so serious is that the accusation of scandal is no longer alleged—it's final. A conviction and jail sentence leaves no room for doubt of guilt in the minds of the voters. In addition, the media coverage of a jail sentence is not likely to boost any candidate's career.

How Groups Deal with Scandal

Candidate

When talking with respondents, I found that candidates can react to accusations of scandals in two ways: 1) they can deny any guilt or involvement, or 2) they can admit involvement or guilt. There are many variables that dictate which approach would be most advantageous to the candidate. Some of these include the type of scandal, the candidate's district, the candidate's popularity, the candidate's representation of his district, etc.

I was told by one man on Capitol Hill that if a candidate has deniability, he should deny a scandal (deniability means that the candidate was not caught "red-handed" and that there is some doubt as to his guilt). The Capitol Hill aide reasoned that strong supporters would believe the
accused candidate was innocent if he claimed to be innocent. For example, many Americans refused to believe Richard Nixon had anything to do with the Watergate cover-up because he claimed innocence. (However, after Nixon had lost his "deniability," few believed his claim to innocence.) Therefore, if the candidate has "deniability," he should deny involvement in the scandal. By denying it, the candidate may convince many voters that he is innocent.

However, when "deniability" does not exist and the question of guilt or involvement is not very debatable, most respondents agreed that admitting guilt was the best tactic. By admitting guilt and expressing regret, a candidate can quiet the media and the opposition quickly. For example, if a Congressman admits guilt and expresses sorrow, the scandal will be in the headlines only briefly and will be looked upon more tolerably. But if the Congressman denies guilt when it seems obvious that he is guilty, the media will keep the story in the headlines for a much greater length of time, and will treat the scandal more negatively.

Admitting guilt is particularly effective when the scandal is a personal problem such as heterosexual promiscuity or alcoholism. By admitting it and expressing sorrow, the voters feel the candidate had a problem or made a mistake, but should be forgiven. Likewise, the media and the opposition cannot play up the scandal after admission of guilt and expression of remorse because they do not want to appear cruel or as if they are trying to capitalize on the scandal. Therefore, admitting guilt and expressing remorse is a good way to quiet the opposition and the media. A good example of this is Representative Daniel Crane (R-Illinois). He admitted and expressed sorrow for his "affair," and he recently won renomination within his party. I
was told by several people in the media covering Capitol Hill that Crane is no longer receiving "bad press." As far as the media is concerned, the situation has basically blown over.

Party Organization

The party organization's main goal is to win elections. The same thing is true of a party organization whose candidate was involved in a scandal. If the party thinks that their candidate who was involved in a scandal will lose, and if the party thinks it can find another candidate who has a better chance to win, the party organization will likely support the new candidate hoping he will win. Furthermore, as Patrick Shea pointed out, when the scandal is hurting the party, the party will try to isolate the scandal and its complications from the party in order to protect itself from the scandalous image.

Nevertheless, if the local party organization cannot field a better candidate, it will stick with the current one even if he is accused of scandal. While there may be some dissent, chances are that most of the party will support the accused candidate if there is no better choice. If the candidate has been a good representative of his district's interests and is seen by the local party organization as having "brought home the bacon," the accused candidate will likely receive support from the local party despite his "scandalous" image.

Congress

The Congress as a whole has two theories about how to deal with scandals: 1) disassociate Congress with the scandal by taking punitive action, or 2) ignore the scandal, thus showing the ability to deal with scandal. Generally, the first method of taking punitive action is used for
the more serious scandals. Conversely, the ignoring method is used for the more "trivial" or personal scandals like alcoholism and heterosexual promiscuity.

There is an underlying theme to both the punitive and ignoring methods: the institution comes first, the individual second. In other words, the Congress feels a need to protect itself, or more accurately its image, from the effects of scandals. This means that Congress' reaction to a scandal is largely determined by what action Congress feels it must take to protect itself.

When the scandal deals with alcoholism or heterosexual promiscuity and the member of Congress has admitted and expressed remorse for it, Congress will not be likely to do anything. If Congress were to take action, it would appear too rigid, heavy-handed, and old fashioned. This is an image that, by and large, Congress does not want.

On the other hand, when the scandal is very serious, as with the misuse of funds, Congress is more likely to take punitive action. Congress wants to let the public know that it does not condone such "dishonesty and corruption in government." If Congress does nothing about a highly publicized, serious scandal, it runs the risk of looking too lax and insensitive to the need of good, honest government. A lax and insensitive image is one that Congress does not want.

The party leadership in Congress protects the party first and the candidate second. For example, when the leadership of a party feels that its candidate has little chance for victory because of a scandal, the leadership will ask him to resign or not to run for office. The leadership's main concern is holding on to that seat in
Congress. Their secondary concern is with the candidate himself. In short, the parties are most concerned with retaining power.

It is difficult to describe exactly how Congress deals with scandal because Congress is really a collection of 535 very different and independent people. As a result, it is difficult to give hard and fast rules that are used on Capitol Hill. This is especially true when dealing with scandals because of the many factors that make scandals either serious or not serious. In short, the information that I have provided about how Congress deals with scandal is by necessity relatively general. But it is accurate to say that as Congress protects itself first, and the individual second, likewise, parties protect their power first, and the individual's second.

Media

The media has a definite interest in publicizing a scandal and making it a headline. First of all, scandals sell papers. Secondly, the press feels the need to be a "watchdog" over the government.

While the media will tend to print almost all "scandalous" events, it does have the freedom or discretion to print or not print a story. The media does not withhold scandals from the public because there is no real motivation to do so. The media stands to lose nothing by publicizing scandals and stands to gain notoriety and influence by publishing them; thus, the media almost always publicizes scandals.

Opponents of "Scandalous" Candidates

The opponents of the candidate accused of scandal would like nothing better than media
THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

coverage of the scandal, so the opponent must be tactful in his effort to see a scandal work to his advantage. For example, if one candidate is accused of graft, his opponent would not be wise to constantly call him a crook or dishonest. A much more effective method would be subtlety. Playing up the theme of honesty and integrity would be effective because the candidate would never actually mention the scandal but listeners would almost automatically think of the dishonesty of the other candidate.

This subtle method of bringing a scandal to the voters' minds is a very effective way to make political gain out of a scandal. For example, if the opponent were to constantly announce in public the scandalous candidate's promiscuous behavior, many voters would feel like the opponent was picking on the "scandalous" candidate. If the voters feel like the opponent is picking on the other candidate, they will think the opponent is petty. When this happens, the scandal backfires and actually hurts the innocent candidate and helps the "scandalous" candidate. The danger of looking petty when playing up a scandal is particularly acute when the scandals are more personal in nature, such as alcoholism, heterosexual promiscuity, and, in some areas, homosexuality. To avoid looking petty, but still play up the scandal, the opponent should portray himself as a good, honest family man, being seen with his wife and children frequently. This would subtly remind voters that he is a man that would never by involved in such scandals. At the same time, he avoids the blacklash effect that can be caused by picking on the other candidate.

More Media Attention

When I asked if there had been greater media attention to scandals in the past ten years,
I received a few nos, but the large majority said, "yes" (13 out of 15 said media attention to scandals had increased). The few respondents who answered "no" felt like the media attention to scandals had remained about constant during the past ten years.

However, the majority felt that media attention had increased. When asked why the media had increased its coverage of scandals, most respondents said, "Watergate." Other less frequently named reasons were 1) new campaign disclosure laws, and 2) the Vietnam War.

Watergate has made the public and the media more skeptical of our government and our leaders. Likewise, the rags-to-riches story, or at least the fame of Woodward and Bernstein, made investigative reporting more popular. Mr. Ciccone, the political editor of the Chicago Tribune, said that "everybody wants to be a Woodstein." This may account for the added attention that scandals receive in the media.

The more strict campaign disclosure laws show the distrust that Watergate generated among the public. Furthermore, they make it easier to find a possible scandal. Therefore, scandals are easier to expose now than they were before Watergate.

Vietnam was cited because it showed the American public the terrible things the government would do for the sake of saving face. (In the late sixties the goals of the war changed drastically until the primary objective had become saving America from embarrassment rather than attaining freedom for the Vietnamese.) As a result, the Vietnam War bred distrust and contempt for the government.
Several newspaper writers said that in the past, the personal lives of politicians were not publicized. They pointed to the fact that Franklin D. Roosevelt was not shown in a wheelchair by the media while in office. While being in a wheelchair is hardly scandalous, it shows that personal things were not publicized. It was told by several respondents that the media, by and large, was well aware of John F. Kennedy’s affairs and yet they did not make an issue of it because it was a personal matter. Whether or not these stories of scandal about Kennedy are true is not important. They serve to illustrate that even though the press thought the scandalous stories were true, they did not print them. Today personal things are publicized almost indiscriminately. For example, Representatives Crane and Howe saw that "personal" scandals were publicized. This shows a basic change in the attitude of the media toward personal scandals.

An interesting paradox arises when we consider the fact that in the past, people were probably less tolerant of all types of scandals, yet the press only publicized the scandals that dealt directly with performance. Today, when the public is generally more tolerant of scandals (at least ones like heterosexual promiscuity, homosexuality, and alcoholism), the press will publicize any scandal, even a fairly trivial one like former Senator Birch Bayh’s (D-Indiana) mishap with the franking privilege. This new treatment of scandals by the media creates a paradox in that years ago, in a more "conservative society," the press was more tolerant of scandals while today, in a society that is more open and uninhibited, the press is rather "intolerant" of scandals.
Conclusion

In my conclusion, I will try to bring together the main points which this study has led me to discover. Everything I learned seemed to center around the idea that there are so many different variables involved in scandals that it is difficult to predict their exact effect. One could say that scandals are like snowflakes—no two are exactly alike.

Some scandals can actually help a candidate. For example, several of the respondents told me that Representative Gerry Studds (D-Massachusetts) has benefited from his homosexuality scandal. His constituency is very liberal and are not bothered by homosexuality. But more importantly, it gave Gerry Studds the image of being his own man, not just following along. That image is believed to have helped Representative Studd's popularity. In another example, George Hansen of Idaho has been involved in tax scandals more than once, but several respondents claimed that it was helping Hansen. He has written a book about how the "Eastern bureaucracy and liberals" are trying to damage his professional reputation. This has given him the image of a hero fighting an almost unbeatable "monster" represented by the government and the Internal Revenue Service.

On the other hand, scandals can be and usually are damaging. Too many candidates have lost elections as a result of a scandal to say that scandals do not hurt a candidate. Take for example Bauman of Maryland; when his scandal became publicized, reelection was out of the question. Perhaps the only question was whether he could avoid spending time behind bars. Likewise with Hinson of Mississippi and Howe of Utah; scandals were "the beginning of the end" of their political careers.
While scandals as a general rule are damaging to election goals, they can in some circumstances actually help or have a neutral effect. There are so many variables involved in what effect a scandal will have that truly accurate information is difficult to accumulate. Therefore, while my findings could not be used to predict the political consequences of every scandal, they are useful as a general guide in understanding the consequences of scandals. These effects can best be summarized by pointing out the following.

1) Voters ranked misuse of funds, graft, drug abuse, and homosexuality as relatively serious while heterosexual promiscuity is perceived as less serious.

2) Campaign contributors ranked all scandals as substantially less important than voters or the media.

3) The media ranked all scandals as substantially more important than voters or campaign contributors.

4) When ranking scandals, regional differences become apparent. The South, the Midwest, rural areas, and highly religious areas viewed scandals more seriously. On the other hand, the Northeast, large urban areas, and California viewed scandals, especially personal scandals, less seriously.

5) The timing of a scandal does affect voters because they have a tendency to forget or forgive. Thus, a scandal right before an election is more serious. Likewise, a scandal right before an election gets more media attention and more negative attention.
6) The breach of trust and hypocrisy make scandals serious to voters. Also, the negative reaction of voters to scandals makes scandals serious to campaign contributors.

7) Candidates can either deny guilt or admit guilt and express remorse for it. By admitting guilt and expressing remorse, a candidate can quiet the opposition and the media.

8) District party organizations' main concern is winning the election, so that goal largely determines how the district deals with a scandal.

9) The Congress's main concern is protecting the institution. Likewise, the Republican and Democratic parties' main concern is maintaining or increasing their power. Thus, a candidate who is likely to lose as a result of a scandal will be encouraged to withdraw.

10) The media has given more attention to scandals because of Watergate, which created a general distrust of government and politicians. Watergate also increased the number of investigative reporters.

These ten points, when considered together, provide an answer to the question, "What are the political consequences of scandal in Congressional elections?" If the answer to this question seems to be complex and influenced by many factors, then I have accurately presented the findings of my research. It may be interesting to see how well these ten points explain the political consequences of scandals in the upcoming Congressional elections.
Dear [Name]:

I am presently taking a course from Dr. David Magleby on Congress at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah. For my term paper in this class, I would like to analyze the political consequences of "scandal" in Congressional Campaigns. As you know, there has been a seeming increase in scandals, such as: graft (Abscam), homosexuality, heterosexual promiscuity, etc. Despite the importance of this topic, I can find no published scholarly information that will help me in studying the effects of scandals in Congressional elections.

As a [position], you have seen the consequences of scandals and know how they have been dealt with. Your knowledge would help me greatly in my research. I realize your time is limited and valuable. Keeping this in mind, I would like to telephone you in about a week to hold a brief (10-12 minute) phone interview. I have enclosed the questionnaire that I will use during our interview, so that you will be familiar with my research topic.

I appreciate your time and expertise in helping me with this research project. If you would like, I would be happy to send you the results of my research upon its completion. Once again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

George C. Landrith
Item #2: Questionnaire

1. How would you rank the following scandals in terms of importance to voters, Campaign Contributors, and the media? (Ranking: 0 = Not at all serious, 10 = Very serious.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Voters</th>
<th>Campaign Contributors</th>
<th>Media</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Heterosexual Promiscuity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graft (Abscam)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homosexual</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misuse of Drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Specify)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Are there some parts of the country that may consider one or more of these "scandals," either less or more serious than the nation on the whole?

Heterosexual Promiscuity

Graft (Abscam)

Homosexuality

Misuse of Funds

Drugs

Other (specify)

Why?
3. Does the timing of a scandal effect its importance and/or affect the media? (Ex: right before election or 1-1/2 years before election for a Congressman and 4-5 years for a Senator?)

   a. to the voters?

   b. to campaign contributors?

   c. to "scandalous candidates" opponents?
4. a. What makes the "scandalous" act so serious to the voters and campaign contributors?

   The act itself?  The circumstances?

   Voters
   Campaign
   Contributors

   The other party involved  Other? (specify)

   Voters
   Campaign
   Contributors

   b. Does a jail sentence make the "scandal" even more damaging? Why?
5. How do the following people handle or deal with scandal? Some may exploit it while others may down-play it. How is this done?

### Scandal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heterosexual</th>
<th>Graft (Abscam)</th>
<th>Homosexual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Promiscuity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Party:

- A) Districts
- B) Congress as a whole

### Media

- Misuse of Funds
- Drugs
- Other (Specify)

### Actors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Party:

- A) Districts
- B) Congress as a whole

### Media
Opponents

6. In the past ten years has there been greater media attention to scandals? Why?

Thank You!
Item #3: Mailing List

I wrote letters and sent questionnaires to the following people. (The "X" after the name indicates that either they responded personally or someone in their office responded.)

National Congressional Election Committee:

X Atwood, Brian. Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee

Daniels, Mitch. National Republican Senatorial Committee

X David, Marta. Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee

X Franks, Martin. Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee

X Vander Jagt, Guy. National Republican Congressional Committee

State Party Leaders:

Akerlow, Charles. Utah Republican Party

Atkins, Chester. Massachusetts Democratic Party

X Colley, Michael. Ohio Republican Party

X Natfios, Andrew. Massachusetts Republican Party

X Shea, Patrick. Utah Democratic Party

Tipps, Paul. Ohio Democratic Party
THE POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

Pollsters:

Hamilton, William
Hart, Peter
X Jones, Dan
Lawrence, Gary
Tarrence, Lance
X Teeter, Robert

Media:

X Ciccone, Richard. Political Editor, Chicago Times
Broder, David. Political Editor, Washington Post
X Eisman, Dale. Political Editor, Richmond Times-Dispatch
X Endicott, William. Political Editor, Los Angeles Times
Nourse, Dick. Anchorman, KSL News
X Parker, Douglas. Political Editor, Salt Lake City Tribune
Webb, Lavarr. Political Editor, Deseret News

Opponents:

X Appelgate, Douglas. Ohio (Representative)
Dowdy, Wayne. Mississippi (Representative)
Dyson, Roy. Maryland (Representative)
Foglietto, Thomas (Representative)
X Mariott, Dan. Utah (Representative)
Quayle, Dan. Indiana (Senator)
ENDNOTES

1 The cover letter and questionnaire can be found in the Appendix.

2 For a list of those to whom the questionnaire was mailed, see Appendix, Item #3.


5 Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


Franks, Martin. Executive Director, Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee. Personal phone interview, 6 March 1984.


