

## POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEDIA SCANDALS: A COMPARATIVE EXPLORATION<sup>1</sup>

GERGANA YANKOVA

Ph.D. Candidate, Government Department, Harvard University, U.S.A.

Email: yankova@fas.harvard.edu

### *Abstract*

*The dissertation seeks to establish the determinants of accountable governments in democratic countries. Its central query is: when the media reveals government misconduct, how do the legislature, the courts, and the public investigate and sanction the executive? The study compares and explores the interaction among three main mechanisms for holding the executive accountable - judicial, legislative, and public. It aims to surmount the current subdivision of accountability which inquires whether governments are responsible to one specific body in particular versus whether they are overall accountable. To overcome this theoretical impediment, I design a new method to gauge all revealed instances of government misconduct, defined here as "political scandals."*

"It seems incontrovertible that political scandals have now acquired a prominent and important place in political life and there are no signs that their political significance is likely to diminish."

Robert Williams, 1998<sup>2</sup>

"The academic value of political scandal is not what it reveals about a particular scandal, but the extent to which the scholar uses it as a means to improve our understanding of the political system."

Mark Silverstein, 2003<sup>3</sup>

### *Introduction*

A central claim of democratic theory is that governments ought to be accountable. In contemporary politics, the media routinely exposes government malfeasance. The question then arises: how do different democracies deal with public

allegations of a government's misconduct? So far, scholarship has distinguished three main factors for political accountability - economic prosperity, institutional design, and leadership tactics. Students of public opinion propound that publicized misconduct cannot tarnish the government's public image when the economy is doing well. Institutionalists underscore the role of elections and the difference between parliamentary and presidential systems. Leadership analysts speculate as to when the executive is motivated to dismiss cabinet members alleged of improper conduct. While each line of inquiry sheds much light on the nature of political accountability, it obscures two very important questions: first, what is the *relative* explanatory power of each factor, and second, what is the *interaction* among the three mechanisms of accountability?

I examine the consequences of political scandal, defined here as the intense media reporting of alleged government misconduct, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of political accountability. While government scandals are the independent variable, executive accountability is the dependent variable. I distinguish between three main types of accountability: *reputational*, which relates to public approval ratings, *institutional*, which includes legislative and legal investigations and sanctions, and *hierarchical*, which refers to prime ministerial and presidential tactics to remove cabinet members involved in scandal. I test the relative explanatory power of the three conventional factors - economic prosperity, institutional design, and leadership tactics, and then I propose three additional reasons why some governments emerge from scandals unscathed while others become irrevocably damaged. The first additional factor is the level of uncertainty that separates advanced Western democracies from newly established transitional democracies. Second, I suggest that the type and frequency of scandals also shape the public perception of the scandal. Third, I examine whether public opinion reflects the changes in institutional and hierarchical accountability.

Key to this goal is the creation of a multi-country database of contemporary political scandals. The database will include all major political scandals for the last ten to fifteen years in eight countries. The countries have been selected so that they maximize variation on the three structural variables: economy, level of democracy, and institutional setup. Tentatively, I choose Poland, Russia, USA, Germany (or Great Britain), Bulgaria, Italy, and the Czech Republic (or Slovakia). Without underestimating the amount of required effort, I believe that data collection can be accomplished within one year of field research. There are three reasons why I think that this is an attainable goal. First, the database will exclude minor

<sup>1</sup> This Ph.D. prospectus was defended in June, 2005. It has been modified since then. At the time of publication, all original data of newspaper scandals have already been collected. Comments and suggestions are very welcome.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Williams. *Political Scandals in the USA*. (United Kingdom: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

<sup>3</sup> Mark Silverstein. "The Clinton Scandal and the Future of American Politics," *American Political Science Review*, (June, 2001): 485-485.

scandals, since they are proven unlikely to have consequences on any dimension of political accountability.<sup>4</sup> Second, big scandals in Germany, the UK, and the USA are recorded in readily available chronologies and books on scandals.<sup>5</sup> Third, for the new democracies, where secondary literature on scandals is scarce, I have designed a special strategy of data collection that relies on outsourcing some of the newspaper coding to qualified graduate students.

It is important to make three caveats. First, political scandals involve only cases of highly publicized government malfeasance. Therefore I am not interested in how scandals emerge, what causes them, or who instigates them. Second, political scandals usually involve individual ministers, but I will examine the consequences for the government as a whole. Third, I believe that scandals are important even if they do not affect electoral results, or if their effects are ephemeral. Without a doubt, scandals affect public approval ratings, which then translate into political capital. Political capital is essential when the government wants to introduce an unpopular law with short-term costs and long-term benefits, such as health care or social security reforms.

In the proposal, I proceed as follows: first, I outline the empirical puzzle and articulate the main research question. Second, I briefly examine the notion of political accountability and how I intend to incorporate it into the study of scandal. Subsequently, I present a table with the independent and dependent variables and the respective hypotheses, and I expound on each of them. Fourth, I present the rationale for choosing the cases and the method of data collection. Sixth, I discuss the complications and solutions for operationalizing “political scandal.” Then I present a sample table for compiling data and suggest ways to measure the variables. I conclude with several implications and suggestions for future research.

### ***The Empirical Puzzle and the Major Question***

Not all corruption scandals end in the same way. The 1994 financial abuse scandals in Italy and the USA, and the 1999 corruption allegations in Russia and Germany had quite different repercussions. These four scandals are comparable since they featured similar charges of financial abuse committed by equally high-ranking officials. 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 for rewarding a renovation contract to the Swiss Company Mabetex. The Italian Prime minister Berlusconi was suspected of bribing judges to cover up his tax evasion.

*Ceteris paribus*, one would expect that Clinton, Kohl, Yeltsin, and Berlusconi faced similar destinies. Empirically seen, however, the outcomes of these scandals could not have been more diverse. 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 eve of the millennium, but he ensured the succession of a loyal secret service man, Putin; Chancellor Kohl resigned as an honorary chairman of the CDU, and his party had a hard time recuperating from the public stigma.

Ultimately, the Italians, the Russians, the Germans and the Americans formed different opinions of the credibility of the scandalous politicians and of the system as a whole. Both the job approval ratings of President Clinton and the public image of his persona remained intact during the Whitewater scandal. Kohl’s party, the Christian Democratic Union, was severely punished in the ensuing elections. In Italy, the Census reported that the public mind had changed “sharply”, and that as a result of the scandal, people think that “the political class is bent on suicide.”<sup>6</sup> In Russia, the scandal barely caused any disturbance of the approval ratings.

These case studies raise one important analytical question: Why do similar scandals destroy the career and public image of some politicians in some countries, but leave others’ public image unscathed? To put it in Lowi’s words: why is it that a political scandal in one country will make hardly a ripple, even when fully exposed and defined as a scandal, when in another country it is treated as an event of regime-shattering importance?<sup>7</sup>

What are the role and consequences of political scandals? Do they increase democratic accountability? Markovits and Silverstein believe that scandals activate the exercise of democratic accountability. Scandals are rituals that make the abstract value of liberal democracy tangible and visible and in doing so, they contribute to reinforcing

<sup>4</sup> Evelyn Bytzek, forthcoming. “Politisches Ereignis: Diskussion, Definition und Auswahl” (Ph.D. dissertation, Mannheim University, forthcoming 2006/2007).

<sup>5</sup> These sources are cited below.

<sup>6</sup> Patrick McCarthy. *The Crisis of the Italian State* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> Theodore Lowi. “Forward” in *The Politics of Scandal*, ed. Silverstein and Markovits. (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, 1988): 10.

the legitimacy of law and due process.<sup>8</sup> Ginsberg advances a very different evaluation of the consequences of scandals. In his view, far from promoting more transparent and accountable governments, scandals have very harmful consequences for legal and political institutions of accountability. The use of congressional investigations, media exposes, and judicial proceedings in an overly publicized way undermines the legitimacy of the mechanism of political accountability.<sup>9</sup>

***Political accountability: definition, measurement, and connection to scandal.***

“The literature on political accountability reminds its student of the old story about the blind man and the elephant. Each man felt a different part of the elephant’s body and had a different impression of the whole animal... There is little awareness shown in many of these works of the other dimensions of this ‘elephant.’<sup>10</sup>

This study arises from a fundamental agreement that exploring political accountability from the standpoint of any one particular aspect leads to one-sided, incomplete, and ultimately-unreliable assessments. The conventional approach takes up one accountability mechanism and looks into how it relates to various issues. Most scientists concentrate on formal, electoral-accountability mechanisms. Others explore the horizontal linkages between the executive on the one hand and the judicial and legislative powers on the other. But what happens when, for example, the legislature does not pursue allegations of government misconduct, but the electorate votes the government out of office, or vice versa? Is political accountability in this case small or large? A legislative specialist would estimate it to be small, but an overall appraisal would reach the opposite conclusion.

Ultimately, the main interest is whether the executive is accountable overall for alleged misconduct, not whether any separate branch of the system can hold the incumbents accountable. The primary reason for the current compartmentalization of

the concept of executive accountability is that there is no readily available record of instances of governmental culpability liable to judicial, legislative, and public sanctions. I surmount this impediment by designing a new method to gauge all revealed instances of government misconduct, defined here as “political scandals.” I start from the issue of government misconduct, and then trace how it relates to the various dimensions of political accountability. But before I make that connection, three main questions arise: What is political accountability? What analytical frameworks exist to conceptualize analytical accountability? And how are political scandals connected with political accountability?

Democratic systems are premised on the idea of delegation of authority.<sup>11</sup> Accountability is a constituent part of democracy since it ensures that the elected officials use that delegated authority to represent the interests of the citizens. Hence, most definitions portray political accountability as a *relationship*.<sup>12</sup> Those who delegate authority and demand accountability are the principals, and those who execute authority and owe accountability are the designated agents. Broad consensus exists in the literature that accountability has two constituent elements: ability to inquire *information* about the actions of the government, and ability to *sanction* those actions.<sup>13</sup> The variation comes when considering who the principal is that requests the information and imposes the sanctions. Principals can be individuals, institutions, or the public. Depending on the principal, we can distinguish between five types of political accountability - electoral, legislative, legal, hierarchical, and public-reputational.

Under *electoral accountability*, the principal - the electorate - controls the government through elections. Electoral accountability considers incumbents to be “accountable, when citizens can discern representative from unrepresentative governments and can sanction them appropriately.”<sup>14</sup> Przeworski et al. distinguish between mandate and accountability representation, depending on whether the parties want to be elected or reelected. Electoral accountability, however, does not guarantee wholesale accountability. Fair, competitive, and inclusive elections satisfy Robert Dahl’s idea of a “polyarchy”,<sup>15</sup> or political democracy. Elections are

<sup>8</sup> Andrei Markovits and Mark Silverstein. *The Politics of Scandal. Power and Process in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Holmes and Meiers Publishers, 1988).

<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Ginsberg. *Politics by Other Means. Politicians, Prosecutors, and the Press from Watergate to Whitewater* (New York: Norton Books 2002); Peruzzoti, Enrique. “Media Scandals and Societal Accountability. Assessing the Role of the Senate Scandal in Argentina”, online [http://www.utdt.edu/departamentos/politica/workshop/pdfs/conf\\_100403\\_005.PDF](http://www.utdt.edu/departamentos/politica/workshop/pdfs/conf_100403_005.PDF).

<sup>10</sup> Robert Keohane, “The Concept of Accountability in World Politics and the Use of Force,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 24/4 (2003): 1121-41.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Dahl. *Polyarchy*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971).

<sup>12</sup> This is precisely the reason why accountability, which defines a relationship between two agents, is different from responsibility, which defines the self-perception of one agent.

<sup>13</sup> Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond, and Marc Plattner. *The Self-Restraining State. Power and Accountability in New Democracies* (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999): 4.

<sup>14</sup> Adam Przeworski, Susan Stokes and Bernard Manin. *Democracy, Accountability and Representation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Dahl, “Polyarchy.”

no small achievement, but they occur only periodically, and their effectiveness at securing vertical accountability is unclear, especially given the inchoate party systems, high voter and party volatility, poorly defined issues, and sudden policy reversals that prevail in most new polyarchies.<sup>16</sup>

*Legislative accountability* “depends on the existence of state agencies that are legally empowered - and factually willing and able - to take actions ranging from routine oversight to criminal sanctions or impeachment in relation to possibly unlawful actions or omissions by other agents or agencies of the state.”<sup>17</sup> The notion of legislative accountability stems from the idea of checks and balances that the American Federalists envisioned in their papers.<sup>18</sup> This tradition of inquiry usually asks when and how often government officials report to Congress, and how often the prime minister takes part in parliamentary proceedings.<sup>19</sup> In this vein of research, Thieriault finds out that 23% of the issues in the legislature were brought up by a “scandal, event, or a legislator.”<sup>20</sup>

*Legal accountability* is a subtype of horizontal accountability, which also includes legislative accountability, and refers to the actions of the Justice Department, Attorney General, Independent Counsel, the Supreme Court, and any other courts that might be involved in pursuing executive accountability.

*Hierarchical accountability* applies to relationships within an organization, in this case the government. Superiors can remove subordinates from office, constrain their tasks and discretionary powers, and adjust their financial compensation.<sup>21</sup> Hierarchical accountability applies only to cases where the alleged official is subordinate to the Prime Minister or the President.

*Public reputational accountability* refers here to public approval ratings of the government. Reputational accountability applies to situations in which reputation, widely and publicly known, provides a mechanism for accountability *even in the*

*absence of other mechanisms.* It is identical with “moral capital” or “political capital”, which refers to a reservoir of popular approval that the leaders can potentially use for legitimacy and political survival.<sup>22</sup> This is not an active type of accountability, as the disgruntled public does not have an official mechanism for inquiring information and imposing sanctions. Electoral accountability is a more active type of public accountability. However, elections occur at infrequent intervals and therefore provide an imprecise measure of the changing public mood in the event of a scandal. That is why I use reputational accountability instead of electoral accountability, since monthly approval ratings of the government provide more manageable, accessible, and, above all, more frequent data to gauge the public sentiments.

Keohane distinguishes between three different syndromes of accountability: *subordinate vertical*, where the principal in a leadership position controls the agents in a hierarchy; *elite controlling vertical*, where people in non-leadership positions hold leaders accountable, and horizontal, where agents and principals have roughly equal status. All these aspects are reflected in table 1.

In table 2, I build upon Keohane’s categorization to demonstrate the juxtaposition between the accountability syndromes, accountability mechanisms, designated principal, agent, and the avenues for sanctioning and information. For the purposes of this paper, the designated agent is always the prime minister and his/her ministers, and the signaling device is always media disclosure. Although the role of signaling is always fulfilled by the media, it is important to note that allegations do not have to originate through investigating reporting only. Charges can be brought up in the parliament or in court, but the significant point is that the scandal begins when the media generates enough publicity about these charges, regardless of their origin.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Overview of the theory and hypotheses***

In the following part, I identify five possible determinants of executive accountability- economic prosperity, institutional design, number and frequency of scandals, experience with democracy and actors’ strategies. Graph 1 and table 3 illustrate the interconnections between the hypotheses. I use the term “institutional accountability” to refer to cases when the courts and/or the legislature start and conclude investigations of the executive. Hierarchical accountability denotes cases when the prime minister

<sup>16</sup> Andreas Schedler. “Taking Uncertainty Seriously: The Blurred Boundaries of Democratic Transition and Consolidation,” *Democratization* 8/4 (2001): 1-22.

<sup>17</sup> O’Donnell. “Horizontal Accountability and New Democracies,” *Journal of Democracy* 9.3 (1998): 112-126.

<sup>18</sup> Manin in O’Donnell, “*Horizontal Accountability and New Democracies.*”

<sup>19</sup> R A W Rhodes and P Dunleavy. *Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive.* (Macmillan Press, 1995).

<sup>20</sup> Thieriault 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Keohane. “The Concept of Accountability in World Politics and the Use of Force.”

<sup>22</sup> John Kane. *The Politics of Moral Capital.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Romzek and Dubnik present an alternative categorization of accountability from that of Keohane.

or the president dismisses subordinates. Reputational accountability relates to public approval ratings of the government.

### *Explanatory factor: Economic Prosperity*

**Hypothesis 1:** When the economy is good, the public is less likely to sanction alleged government misconduct.

Traditional theories contend that economic performance and party affiliation are the main determinants of public satisfaction with incumbents. Alternative studies argue that the media's portrayal of the officials' character, trustworthiness, and knowledge can also greatly affect the government's popularity. Economic voting and party identification studies contend that incriminating information is not powerful enough to overturn previous judgments, because people construe the gravity of the scandalous offense, its truthfulness, and its importance in a way that bolsters their prior beliefs. The process is known as "motivated reasoning" and "cognitive dissonance."<sup>24</sup> By implication, such studies view scandals as largely epiphenomenal. Media studies counter that people's economic and party preferences are not sufficiently intense, or citizens cannot easily weigh the relative importance of issues of character and performance. Thus the media can affect the public through framing, learning, and agenda-setting.<sup>25</sup>

The decline of governmental popularity in the West bolstered theories that economic performance shapes public support for the incumbents. They argue that the first twenty-five years after World War II were a golden era that gave rise to heightened expectations about economic growth. As the welfare state expanded and people realized that their difficulties getting jobs were structural and not their fault, they started holding their government ever more accountable for their economic misfortunes.<sup>26</sup> The high inflationary outburst in the early 1970s proved these high expectations were unsustainable. The subsequent increase in popular dissatisfaction coincided in time with the decrease in economic

performance.<sup>27</sup> It still remains unclear how exactly economic performance is measured (unemployment, poverty, inflation), and whether people care about absolute or relative economic performance.<sup>28</sup>

On the opposite side of the debate, studies show that media reports of incumbents' misconduct can influence public support for the government equally strongly. Since the impact of scandals in Central and Eastern Europe has received by far less scholarly attention than that in Great Britain and the USA, it is hard to assess the generalizability of the results.<sup>29</sup> For the U.S., Orren demonstrates that Watergate had just as significant an impact on trust as did the Vietnam War.<sup>30</sup> Mandelli shows that each U.S. president's approval rating dropped at least ten percentage points for three out of four major scandals.<sup>31</sup> In Great Britain, unemployment negatively accounted for 22% of the government popularity, while the effect of news about scandalous behavior was more than twice as big at 56%.<sup>32</sup> An opinion poll conducted in France in 1992 found that 29% of those polled cited "corruption scandals" as the first reason why they did not vote for the Socialist Party, while "unemployment" came second.<sup>33</sup> I will test the traditional hypothesis that citizens of less prosperous countries will be just as concerned as citizens of wealthier democracies about economic performance relative to the character of the incumbent.

<sup>27</sup> Powell/Whitten. "A Cross National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context," *American Journal of Political Science* 37/2 (1993): 391-414; Lewis-Beck, Michael. *Economics and Elections. The Major Western Democracies*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Regina Lawrence and Lance Bennett. "Rethinking Media Politics and Public Opinion: Reactions to the Clinton-Lewinsky Scandal," *Political Science Quarterly* 116/3 (2001): 425-451.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Miller. "Type-set Politics: Impact of Newspapers on Public Confidence," *The American Political Science Review* 73/1 (1979): 67-89; Michael Dimock. "Checks and Choices. The House Bank Scandal's Impact on Voters in 1992," *The Journal of Politics* 57/4 (1995): 1143-1159; Hans Kepplinger. "Skandale und Politikverdrossenheit- ein Langzeitvergleich," in *Medien und Politischer Prozess*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996.; John Thompson. *Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age*. (Cambridge: UK Polity, 2000); Susan Pharr. "Officials' Misconduct and Public Distrust: Japan and the Trilateral Democracies," in *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?*, ed. Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> Gary Orren. Trust, Social Capital, Civil Society, and Democracy," *International Political Science Review*, 22/2 (1997): 201-214.

<sup>31</sup> Andreina Mandelli. "Agenda Setting of Public Sentiments, Quality of News and Quality of Public Life" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> Shaun Bowler and Jeffrey Karp. "Politicians, Scandals, and Trust in Government," *Political Behavior* 26/3 (2003): 271-287.

<sup>33</sup> Christophe Fay. "Political Sleaze in France: Forms and Issues" in *Parliamentary Affairs* 48/4 (1995): 663-677

<sup>24</sup> Mark Fischle. "Mass Response to the Lewinsky Scandal: Motivated Reasoning or Bayesian Updating," *Political Psychology* 21/1 (2000): 135-160; Lodge, Milton and Charles Taber. "An Experimental Test of the Hot Cognition Hypothesis for Political Candidates, Parties and Issues" online: <http://www.sonyeb.edu/polsci/mlodge/hotcog.doc>.

<sup>25</sup> Kent Weaver. "Creating Blame for Fun and Political Profit," paper presented at ECPR, Spain, 2005; John Zaller. "Monica Lewinsky's Contribution to Political Science," *PS: Political Science and Politics* 31/2 (1998): 182-189.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Mansbridge. "Social and Cultural Causes of Dissatisfaction with US Government" in *Why People Don't Trust Government*, ed. Nye, Zelikow, King (Harvard University Press 1997).

## Explanatory factor: Institutional design of parliamentary and (semi)-presidential systems

**Hypothesis 2:** When facing highly publicized allegations of government misconduct, parliamentary democracies are more likely to start a legislative investigation, and presidential democracies are more likely to start a legal investigation.

**Hypothesis 2.1.:** Legal mechanisms of accountability are more efficient in concluding investigations of alleged government misconduct than legislative mechanisms of political accountability.

### ACCOUNTABILITY IN PARLIAMENTARY VERSUS PRESIDENTIAL SYSTEMS

Preliminary statistics of 143 scandals in 22 democracies show that the American share of all scandal processes which are external to the executive is 83%, compared to 70% for France, and only 37% for the UK!<sup>34 35</sup> These results are indicative of the great disparity of institutional means that countries use to pursue scandalous allegations. Two important questions arise: In general, is there a correlation between institutional design and the extent of investigative oversight of the executive? Secondly, do legal mechanisms pursue government accountability better than legislative mechanisms?

On the first question, the debate between the virtues of parliamentarism and the perils of presidentialism is quite telling. Proponents of parliamentary systems argue that presidents are less accountable than prime ministers because they are independently elected and have a fixed term in office.<sup>36</sup> In Linz's view these two conditions make winners and losers sharply defined for the entire period of the presidential mandate. There is no hope for shifts in alliances, expansion of the government's base of support through "national unity" or "emergency" grand coalitions, new elections in response to major new events, and so on.<sup>37</sup>

Cheibub and Przeworski show that from 70 peaceful changes of presidents between 1950 and 1990, only four (4.7%) were due to removal by the

party and interim replacement.<sup>38</sup> One can extend part of this logic to Westminster-type systems as well. In these democracies, the legislature can more easily hold the government accountable since it elects it, but the availability of only two parties imposes a rigidity of alliances very similar to that in presidential systems.

Conventionally, the virtues of these arguments are tested only *indirectly* against the *overall* quality of democracy. The underlying assumption is that if the executive is accountable, then it will behave more in sync with the public interest and democracy as a whole will therefore thrive. The usual criteria are minimal winning one-party cabinets, an effective number of parliamentary parties, index of disproportionality, index of constitutional rigidity, and index of bicameralism.<sup>39</sup> I suggest a simpler but more direct measure of government accountability, which measures the proportion of government members accused of alleged misconduct who were investigated by the courts and legislatures respectively. This measure speaks to the capacity of the accountability bodies to get *activated* and to follow cues from the public domain.

### LEGAL VERSUS LEGISLATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY

Once these bodies are activated, it is an entirely different question as to whether the investigations are successful. Starting an investigation amounts to little political accountability unless the investigation produces results. The success of investigations of government misconduct has three dimensions: authority, bias, and efficiency. I will only briefly sketch the first two and then concentrate on the third criterion. Some argue that legislatures are more authoritative than courts because they are elected. For the same reason, independent counsels and other justice appointees are thought to lack an institutional base of power and to be constrained from mobilizing a counter-response in the political realm by the need to appear independent.<sup>40</sup>

The question of the relative bias of courts and legislatures is the most heated one. Grifitt points out that judges are generally more politically neutral than MPs and the only reason why judges do not appear this way is that they face the unrealistic expectation that a judge's involvement can de-politicize a matter,

<sup>34</sup> These scandals include *all* scandalizers, not only members of the executive body.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Barker. "The Upturned Stone. Political Scandals and Their Investigation Processes in Twenty Democracies," *Crime, Law and Social Change* 21 (1994): 337-373.

<sup>36</sup> Arend Lijphart. *Parliamentary versus Presidential Government*. (Oxford University Press, 1992); Horowitz, Donald L. 2000. "Constitutional Design: An Oxymoron?" in *Designing Democratic Institutions*, ed. by Ian Shapiro and Stephen Macedo. New York: New York University Press, 253-84.

<sup>37</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Jose Cheibub and Fernando Limogni. *Democracy and Development* (Cambridge University Press 2000)

<sup>39</sup> Lijphart, Arend. *Patterns of Democracy: Government Forms and Performance on Thirty-Six Countries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

<sup>40</sup> Katy Harriger. "The Law: The President and the Independent Counsel: Reflections on Prosecutors, Presidential Prerogatives, and Political Power" in *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31/2 (2001): 338.

which is inherently controversial.<sup>41</sup> Proponents of court versus legislative investigations argue further that parliament is incapable of the detachment required to investigate alleged misconduct of ministers. Although in an ideal democratic state, Parliament will fulfill these duties disinterestedly and efficiently, Britain is not such a place and so the need for outsiders to carry out these investigations persists. The real issue is whether they are best performed by judges or by some other species of the genius Establishment.<sup>42</sup>

Mayhew, on the other hand, argues that the American Congress is a very neutral judge when acting as an investigative body and will not give more trouble to the executive branch when a president of the opposite party holds power.<sup>43</sup>

I will test whether legal investigations are more efficient than legislative investigations of alleged government misconduct. I will measure efficiency as the proportion of all existing investigations that produce a sanction or a report in a relatively short time period.

### *Explanatory Factor: Actors' Strategies*

**Hypothesis 3:** Aggressive strategies of fending off allegations of misconduct usually enhance reputational accountability.

**Hypothesis 4:** In countries with greater levels of uncertainty, politicians use more aggressive strategies.

These hypotheses explore the causes and consequences of political agency in cases of highly publicized misconduct. They involve two steps. First, aggressive strategies appear as a dependent variable resulting from the level of uncertainty (hypothesis 4), and then aggressive strategies appear as an independent variable affecting reputational accountability (hypothesis 3). In numerous studies of American presidential scandals, the presentational strategies of the presidents have been deemed very important.<sup>44</sup> Just two months ago, the *Presidential Studies Quarterly* published an article arguing that the cues provided by political actors are the most

important determinants of executive popularity.<sup>45</sup> The year before, the same journal argued that the communication strategies of the Clinton presidency were essential for his public image.<sup>46</sup> Ellis contends that the technique of deflecting blame to subordinates, known as "the lightning rod", is effective in preserving the president's public image.<sup>47</sup> McGraw argues that public officials can have a powerful impact upon the citizens' understanding of political accountability.<sup>48</sup> Anderson explores how Clinton's speech presentations - for example his famous statement "I did not have sex with that woman (avert gaze) Ms Lewinsky," - affected his public image.<sup>49 50</sup>

Yet, we know very little, if anything, about the strategies of the political actors involved in allegations of misconduct in the new democracies. No systematic research explains how their strategies differ from those of politicians in more established countries. If uncertainty is so important, then we should witness more aggressive strategies of politicians in Eastern and Central Europe since they will be trying to defy the status quo. In Russia, Yeltsin used aggressive strategies. He insisted that a video showing the prosecutor general with three prostitutes questioned the prosecutor's moral culpability. Yeltsin tried to dismiss the prosecutor three times. The aggressive strategy was matched by low legislative accountability. 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 to clarify its own jurisdiction. The spectacle was protracted over the course of eight

<sup>45</sup> Matthew Woessner. "Scandal, Elites and Presidential Popularity: Considering the Importance of Cues in Public Support of the President," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35/1 (2005): 94.

<sup>46</sup> Trevor Parry-Giles. "Images, Scandal and Communication Strategies of the Clinton Presidency," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 34/2 (2004): 472.

<sup>47</sup> Richard Ellis. *Presidential Lightning Rods. The Politics of Blame Avoidance* (Kansas: The University Press of Kansas, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Kathleen McGraw. "Managing Blame: an Experimental Test of the Effects of Political Accounts," *American Political Science Review* 85/4 (1991): 1133-1157.

<sup>49</sup> Christopher Anderson. "I Did Not Have Sexual Relations With That Woman <pause, gaze averted> Ms. Lewinsky"- The Iconicity of Democratic Speech in English": <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/anderson/Lewinsky.htm>

<sup>50</sup> The research is endless: Mark Bovens. "The Politics of Blame Avoidance: Defensive Tactics in a Dutch Crime-Fighting Fiasco": <http://www.usg.uu.nl/organisatie/medewerkers/m.bovens/anheier.pdf>; Brandstrom and Kuipers. "From Normal Incidents to Political Crises: Understanding the Selective Policization of Policy Failures," *Government and Opposition* 38/3 (2003): 279-305; Joshua Gamson. "Normal Sins: Sex Scandal Narratives as Institutional Morality Tales," *Social Problems* 48/2 (2000): 185-206; Rodney Barker. *Legitimizing Identities. The Self-Presentation of Rulers and Subjects* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>41</sup> Ian Leigh and Laurence Kustergarten. "Five Volumes in Search of Accountability: The Scott Report," *The Modern Law Review* 59/5 (1996): 695-725.

<sup>42</sup> Ian Leigh and Laurence Kustergarten. "Five Volumes" (1996).

<sup>43</sup> David Mayhem. *Divided We Govern* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> Wesley Hagood. *Presidential Sex. From the Founding Fathers to Bill Clinton*. (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1995).



months until the initial question of culpability had long been forgotten in the never-ending series of accusations and counter-accusations.

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 testify to the relatively low capacity of the judicial system to pursue blame. 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 himself 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."<sup>51</sup>

It is important to compare the strategies used by politicians involved in scandals. This is the most agency-oriented variable, and that is why it might differ for each scandal. Since categorizing strategies is a time-consuming process, it might be most feasible to explore several case studies of similar type in roughly similar conditions.

### **Explanatory Factor: Type and Frequency of Scandals**

**Hypothesis 5:** Frequent scandals ultimately diminish reputational accountability.

**Hypothesis 5.1.:** For private scandals, reputational accountability in secular rational countries is smaller than that in traditional countries.

I will test whether frequent media reports of scandals ultimately desensitize public opinion, and thus diminish reputational accountability. The relative deprivation and cultivation theories may be useful in uncovering the causal mechanism: the more often scandals occur, the more often citizens will expect that scandals will occur, and the less disappointed they are when scandals actually occur. As a result of lower expectations, the public will sanction governments for their misconduct less severely. I will test whether people update their expectations gradually over a prolonged period of time, suddenly after reaching a certain tipping point, or in short, disconnected intervals.<sup>52</sup> The latter scenario would occur when the impact of scandals is ephemeral, although some

studies contend that the effects can persist for eight years.<sup>53</sup>

I will also establish whether citizens perceive some types of misconduct as inherently more reprehensible than others. As Fischle notes, "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."<sup>54</sup> This issue brings up the importance of national and cultural determinants of public opinion. Does public opinion in all democracies treat reports of all kinds of corruption equally? What is the comparative importance of "family values" in evaluations of the incumbent's marital infidelity and moral lapses?

Political cultural studies argue that, regardless of the prominence of the issue, media revelations affect public opinion because of the values embedded in the misconduct.<sup>55</sup> Using Inglehart's typology, one would predict that the public in traditional countries should react to private misconduct more negatively than people in secular-rational countries.<sup>56</sup> Scandals related to marital infidelity should cause more public uproar in the "traditional" USA than in Great Britain (middle range), or in Germany, which is classified as very "secular-rational". I will test whether the same logic extends to secular-rational countries of other religious denominations, such as Bulgaria and Italy.

### ***Explanatory factor: Level of uncertainty in new and established democracies***

**Hypothesis 6:** In new democracies, institutional accountability for alleged government misconduct is less than that in established democracies.

<sup>53</sup> Luke Keele. 2004. "Social Capital, Government Performance, and the Dynamics of Trust in Government," online: <http://www.scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&lr=&safe=off&q=cache:D1wLd3ksUgcJ:polmeth.wustl.edu/papers/03/keele03.pdf+keele+luke>.

<sup>54</sup> Mark Fischle. "Mass Response to the Lewinsky Scandal: Motivated Reasoning or Bayesian Updating."

<sup>55</sup> Harry Eckstein. "Congruence Theory Explained", in *Can Democracy Take Root in Post-Soviet Russia? Explorations in State-Society Relations*, ed. H. Eckstein et al. (Lanham, MD and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998): 3-33; Almond/Verba. *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, (SAGE Publication, 1989)

<sup>56</sup> Ronald Inglehart. *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy*. (Cambridge University Press, 2005)

<sup>51</sup> La Repubblica, November 26 1994.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Pierson. *Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis* (Princeton University Press 2004).



“Throughout Eastern Europe, political authority remains only very weakly accountable in both formal and political terms.”<sup>57</sup> Although this statement can barely surprise students of transitional countries, it still remains unclear to what extent it indeed reveals a true picture of the region and whether one sees fewer investigations and sanctions of alleged government misconduct *in comparison* to other democracies. Even if Philp is right, we still need to establish what it is exactly about Eastern and Central Europe that makes it more amenable to a lack of institutional accountability than Western democracies. Transitional countries, especially in the last ten years, seemingly count as democracies, and for sure count as polyarchies, as they have fair elections and democratic constitutions.

I would test whether, even when accounting for the institutional design (parliamentary versus presidential and legal versus legislative), and economic prosperity, the legal and institutional capacity to hold governments accountable will differ depending on the level of political uncertainty. “Political uncertainty” refers to the number of years of experience of democracy. *Ex ante*, uncertainty will be greater in transitional countries than in established Western democracies, because of the fluid party structure and the short time horizons of the actors. Formally, uncertainty is considered least when democracy is the only game in town: “Behaviorally, democracy becomes the only game in town when no significant political group seriously attempts to overthrow the democratic regime.”<sup>58</sup>

Given highly publicized charges of government misconduct, new democracies will tend to punish government officials less than established democracies. Established wisdom propounds that actors involved in a scandalous situation in new democracies will use the power balance to change the rules of accountability, instead of using the rules of accountability to change the power balance.

Well-entrenched constitutions may legitimate particular principal-agent relationships so that policies really can be analyzed within an established principal-agent framework. But in less highly institutionalized domestic regimes, existing authorizations are typically fragile, and often contested. In weakly institutionalized systems, the struggle is ongoing, and it is only temporally resolved in accordance with

power relationships. Indeed, we can think of authorization-reauthorization cycle.<sup>59</sup>

Since it is very hard to operationalize “power relationships” and a “cycle of re-authorization,” I would simply test whether scandals in new democracies result in fewer institutional sanctions than scandals in old democracies.

***Explanatory Factor: Interaction between the three dimensions of accountability***

**Hypothesis 7:** Efficient legislative and legal accountability diminishes reputational accountability.

These hypotheses turn the former dependent variables - institutional and hierarchical accountability - into independent variables. They involve a second order analysis, which explores how the public will judge the misconduct of the government in cases where the incumbent is officially sanctioned. The study is further complicated because the interaction can work in different directions. If the prime minister dismisses a subordinate incumbent (higher hierarchical accountability), the popularity of the government will most likely rise (lower reputational accountability). However, if parliament, Congress, or the courts sanction a government member (higher institutional accountability), then the popularity of the government will most likely fall (higher reputational accountability). If these scenarios are proven by the cases, then the government’s public image will change depending on whether the source of sanction is internal or external to the executive.

It is precisely the closing of the ritual of disclosure, investigation and discussion with some sort of institutional punishment that serves to ultimately reaffirm the belief in the institutional safeguards that representative democracy provides to reduce the risks of electoral delegation. If that institutional closing is missing, the scandal, rather than reaffirming and strengthening public trust in democracy will simply erode public confidence in representative institutions<sup>60</sup>

This idea goes back to Durkheim, who argues that transgressions bolster the public approval of the system when the offenders are punished and reforms are instituted.<sup>61</sup> In a similar vein, Michel Foucault contends that public executions during the Middle Ages manifested the operation of power. “Torture assured the articulation of the secret on the public, the procedure of investigation on the operation of power,

<sup>57</sup> Mark Philp. “Access, Accountability and Authority: Corruption and the Democratic Process,” *Crime, Law and Social Change* 36 (2001): 357-377.

<sup>58</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan. *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Keohane. “The Concept of Accountability in World Politics and the Use of Force”.

<sup>60</sup> Enrique Peruzzotti. “Media Scandals and Societal Accountability”.

<sup>61</sup> Emile Durkheim. *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. The New York: The Free Press, 1976.

in the same horror, the crime had to be manifested and annulled.”<sup>62</sup>

The question arises, then, of how public approval of the executive (*not of the whole system*) change in lieu of legislative and legal sanctioning. Does the institutional response to government misconduct affect the opinion of the electorate? Does public opinion change when Congress, judicial committees, or independent councils do not punish the publicized government misconduct? Does it matter whether the alleged politician is dismissed, or kept in office?

In graph 3, I juxtapose the Whitten/Powell<sup>63</sup> index of government accountability in four countries and Holmes’ data on public preference for corrupt and efficient politicians.<sup>64</sup>

It turns out that all types of political accountability go together. When the government is publicly corrupt and its behavior is not sanctioned formally by courts or Congress, reputational accountability is also low. On the other hand, the public shows much disapproval of corrupt executives in countries where the institutional bodies pursue executive accountability stringently.

Contrary to legislative and legal sanctioning, hierarchical accountability (which basically refers to the prime minister firing his officials) has a positive effect on reputational accountability (which refers to the public approval of the executive). Keith and Dowding show statistically that government ratings rise when the Prime minister in Great Britain dismisses a Cabinet member involved in a media scandal.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, it matters for public opinion whether the government sanctions itself or whether some external body sanctions it. In the former case, public approval increases, and in the second cases, it decreases.

There might also be a temporal dimension to the relationship between institutional and reputational accountability. As more scandals occur, public disapproval of alleged government officials may diminish more in countries where formal institutional accountability is greater.

### Case selection

In choosing the cases, I need to consider the following criteria:

1. Scandals are rare, and therefore in order to have enough data points, I should include as many countries as possible.

2. The minimum required condition is that a country is a polyarchy, i.e. it has regular and fair elections. Countries need to have a free media, which portrays scandals. The independence of the media can be measured as the degree of state capture, or by the legislative frameworks. Indices of both measures are readily available.<sup>66</sup>

3. The research will consist of three parts: 1. content analysis of newspapers to identify scandals involving allegations of government misconduct, which have high-saliency. High-saliency scandals are present in the newspaper for at least five to seven days; 2. an analysis of the legal, legislative and hierarchical accountability, which is comprised of investigation and sanctioning; and 3. analysis of the correlation between scandals, sanctioning and public approval of the government

4. Research design requires the greatest variation on the independent variables.<sup>67</sup>

5. I need to consider the following independent variables: parliamentary versus presidential system, transitional versus established democracy, economic development, frequency and type of scandals, and actors’ strategies. Since the type and frequency of scandals and actors’ strategies cannot be known until the research is complete, I will choose case studies on the basis of the first three criteria.

6. Parliamentary, transitional, wealthy: Czech Republic

Semi- presidential, transitional, wealthy: Poland

Parliamentary, transitional, poor:

Bulgaria

Parliamentary, non-transitional, wealthy: Germany

Semi-presidential, transitional, poor: Russia

Presidential, non-transitional, wealthy: USA  
Parliamentary, established, poor:

Italy

Presidential, established, poor: TBD

Creating an original and comprehensive database of major political scandals is very important, because it will facilitate dialogue amongst the rapidly growing

<sup>62</sup> Foucault, Michael. *Discipline and Punish*. New York: Vintage Books, 1977: 55.

<sup>63</sup> Powell/Whitten. “A Cross National Analysis of Economic Voting: Taking Account of the Political Context,” *American Journal of Political Science* 37/2 (1993): 391-414.

<sup>64</sup> Leslie Holmes. “Political Corruption Scandals and Public Attitudes towards Party Financing: Poland and Germany Compared,” paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Edmund Mokrzycki Symposium in 2004.

<sup>65</sup> Keith Dowding and Won-Taek Kang, “Ministerial Resignations 1945-1997,” *Public Administration* 76 (1998): 411-429.

<sup>66</sup> Simeon Djankov, Caralee McLiesh, Tatiana Nenova and Andrei Schleifer. “Who Owns the Media?” online: [http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/shleifer/papers/media\\_s\\_eptember\\_2002\\_JLE.pdf](http://www.economics.harvard.edu/faculty/shleifer/papers/media_s_eptember_2002_JLE.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> King, Keohane, and Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*. (Princeton University Press, 1994).

literature on the subject, which suffers from inconsistent and incomparable measurements. It also presents the only way to find a quantifiable method to assess and compare the political accountability for alleged government misconduct in countries with various institutional designs and previous experience with democracy.

### *How to measure scandal?*

#### WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS?

Scientists disagree what constitutes a political scandal just as vigorously as they agree that scandals are difficult to define. This confusion is not necessarily unfounded, although it is entirely surmountable. I can identify several reasons why scandals pose a definitional hurdle.

1. Relationship variable: Scandals refer to a set of relationships between several variables, rather than to specific variables or facts.

2. Idiosyncrasy of each scandal: These relationships come together in various forms and ways, which makes scandals extremely difficult to typify.

3. Intangibility: scandals are often a construct as opposed to an existing fact or physical movement, such as going to vote, giving a speech, or receiving a certain income.

4. Rarity: scandals by definition are rare events, which signify a state out of the ordinary, and therefore there are not enough of them to examine with a sufficient degree of freedom. Small scandals are more prevalent but less important.

5. Cascading events: scandals often refer to a set of events, as opposed to one single event. They involve the coordination and sequencing of public opinion, media attention, executive discretion, and institutional alert.

6. Causal bias: Scandals emerge only after the public, politicians, and institutions respond to an allegation of government misconduct, and therefore it is difficult to disentangle scandals from their consequence.

#### WHAT ARE THE SOLUTIONS?

There are five distinct possibilities for operationalizing scandal:

1. Gravity of the alleged offense in reference to a conceived societal norm.<sup>68</sup> (Please see appendix for concrete definitions)

<sup>68</sup> Michael Schudson. "Notes on Scandal and the Watergate Legacy," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/9 (2004): 1231-1238; Anthony King. "Sex, Money and Power," in *Politics in Britain and the United States. Comparative Perspectives*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1986.

2. Calls for resignation made by politicians in parliamentary discussions, or by onlookers and journalists in the media.<sup>69</sup>

3. Media attention given to a particular topic measured either as number of days in the media or as number of articles in the press, or both: "An investigation enters this category if it generated a specified kind of content of one or more front page stories for at least 20 days, not necessarily consecutive."<sup>70</sup>

4. Dummy variables for when the scandal was on/off.<sup>71</sup>

5. Chronicles, which contain short summaries and bibliographical references. Some examples are: *Political Scandals and Causes Celebres: since 1945: An International Reference Compendium* 1991, *An Encyclopedia of Scandals, Power and Greed* 2003, *New Scandals of the Republic: 40 Years of Affairs and Scandals in the Federal Republic of Germany* 1989, *Die Neue Skandal Chronik* 1994.

#### 6.

The most successful approach would include a combination of all these. The working definition of a political scandal here is "the intense reporting about a real or imagined effect."<sup>72</sup> I would follow Keith and Dowding's method for the UK: 1. getting a name list of all the people who served in 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.<sup>73</sup> 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 reasonable coverage on inside pages; 1 if the issue only had small coverage on the inside pages. For online articles, judgment is made on the amount of coverage.<sup>74</sup> For the purposes of data collection, I intend to follow similar logic.

### **Field Study and Data Collection**

In the end of the field research phase, I hope to produce a database, which includes about three

<sup>69</sup> Torun Dewan and Keith Dowding. "The Corrective Effect of Ministerial Resignations on Government Popularity," *American Journal of Political Science* 49/1 (2005): 46-56.

<sup>70</sup> Evelyn Bytzek. "Politisches Ereignis: Diskussion, Definition und Auswahl."

<sup>71</sup> Luke Keele. 2004. "Social Capital, Government Performance, and the Dynamics of Trust in Government."

<sup>72</sup> Frank Esser. "Tabloidization of News: A Comparative Analysis of Anglo-American and German Press Journalism" in *European Journal of Communication*, 14/3 (1999): 291-324.

<sup>73</sup> Keith Dowding and Won-Taek Kang, "Ministerial Resignations 1945-1997."

<sup>74</sup> Torun Dewan and Keith Dowding. "The Corrective Effect of Ministerial Resignations on Government Popularity".

hundred scandals for each country. For each scandal, I will define the type of offense and several additional characteristics. The research will cover the last ten years in order to capture the uncertainty at the start of the democratization process in the newly established democracies.

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, or a court trial, 7. Did the scandal get institutionalized: trial, parliamentary debates, or independent Counsel, 8. Outcome of the scandal: dismissal, resignation, or 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 or aggressive strategy of the actors, 15. Type of scandal. Tables 4 and 5 reflect the methodological details.

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

$$L_m = a + \alpha_1 ECON_m + \alpha_2 POL_m + \alpha_3 FREQUENCYScandals + \alpha_4 TYPEScandal + \alpha_5 TypeSTRATEGY + \alpha_6 InstitutionalDESIGN + \alpha_7 LegalSanction + \alpha Legislative Sanction + \alpha Hierarchical Sanction + \alpha + \Sigma$$

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, and unemployment during the month.  $POL_m$  is a vector of the political effects of the dummy variables "Proximity to election" and "uncertainty" measured in number of years of democracy.

#### HOW TO MEASURE LEGAL AND LEGISLATIVE ACCOUNTABILITY?

Since it is very hard to measure the bias and authority of legal and legislative accountability, I will simply concentrate on the capacity of the legal and legislative bodies to produce results. Since some scandals are bogus, the actual results (sanction vs.

acquittal) are not important. This approach limits the scope of the analysis to efficiency, but it is the only feasible option. The variable of legal and legislative sanction will denote the type of investigation as described in the table 6, and then it will measure the number of days between the outbreak of scandal and the start of the investigation (activation), the number of days of investigation, and whether the investigation produced a report or other sanctions.

#### HOW TO MEASURE ACTORS' STRATEGIES?

Hierarchical accountability refers to two components: 1. the ability of the main executive to dismiss government officials and 2. actors' strategies. While the first is fairly straightforward, the second is detailed in Schuetz's typology described in table 7.<sup>75</sup>

#### HOW TO MEASURE REPUTATIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY?

The dependent variable – reputational accountability – refers directly to "government popularity." It 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.<sup>76</sup>

#### HOW TO CATEGORIZE SCANDALS?

The categorization of the types of scandal includes nine categories: marital infidelity, sexual harassment, mismanagement of public funds, incompetence, bribery, nepotism, delayed reaction, illegal action, and 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".<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Astrid Schuetz. "Assertive, Offensive, Protective and Defensive Styles of Self-Presentation: A Taxonomy," *Journal of Psychology* 132/6 (1998).

<sup>76</sup> Donatella Della Porta. "Social Capital, Beliefs in Government, and Political Corruption" in *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Countries?*, ed. Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>77</sup> Anthony King. "Sex, Money and Power," in *Politics in Britain and the United States. Comparative Perspectives*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1986.

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 Blunkett brought up the fact that he sped up the confirmation of the immigration status of his lover's nanny. Both officials resigned.

### ***Further Implications and Avenues for Future Research***

I can identify two main avenues for further research. Is accountability a zero-sum game? How do political scandals affect not only approval of the government but also trust in the whole system?

For now, I will limit myself to testing the effects of legislative and legal investigations on the public approval of the government, and trying to establish how external investigations and sanctions reflect on the public perception of the government. For the future, however, it would be interesting to see whether accountability is a zero-sum game. In a given situation of high publicity of government misconduct, how does the reputation of parliament or the Independent Counsel change? Is there a trade-off between the reputations of the investigative bodies, or are they all in the same boat when it comes to punishing the executive? Does the electorate think in terms of a dichotomy between the executive and the institutions of accountability, or does it perceive the very institutions of accountability as competitors?

Secondly, how do scandals affect trust in the democracy as a whole? Do scandals erode public support for the government only, or does this negativity translate into cynicism towards the legitimacy of the whole system?<sup>78</sup> Philp argues that in very stable systems in which corruption is rare and on minor scale, accusations of corruption may not damage the authority and legitimacy of the system as a whole. But in weak and newly democratized systems, scandal and accusations of corruption can become key weapons with which to undermine one's political opponents.<sup>79</sup>

Apathy and system cynicism carry 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.<sup>80</sup>

There are also two points of potential future interest: 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? 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, 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 become more frequent 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.<sup>81</sup> One way to ascertain the direction of the relationship is 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.

### ***Conclusion***

The dissertation aims at a comprehensive analysis of political accountability for highly-publicized alleged government misconduct. This is a novel approach, which lifts the boundaries among traditions exploring disparate types of accountability, and provides a multidimensional and interactive concept of government accountability. It comprises three main levels and explores the interactions between them. I examine how informal reputational accountability is affected by the exercise of formal accountability, how horizontal accountability affects vertical

<sup>78</sup> Ansolabehere and Iyengar. *Going Negative: How Political Advertisements Shrink and Polarize the Electorate* (Free Press 1997).

<sup>79</sup> Mark Philp. "Access, Accountability and Authority: Corruption and the Democratic Process".

<sup>80</sup> Susan Pharr and Robert Putnam, "Disaffected Democracies".

<sup>81</sup> Manuel Castells. "The Power of Identity" (Blackwell Publishers, 1997).

accountability, and how structural, institutional accountability reflects on the agency and accountability of political actors.

The research challenges the established wisdom that public approval of the government depends exclusively on economic performance. It also bridges the gap between the literatures on institutional design and quality of democracy on the one hand, and political accountability on the other. I hope to be able to answer several important questions: How important are scandals for the stability and legitimacy of democratic governments? Do scandals affect the popularity of incumbents in Eastern and Central Europe less than they do in the West, and why is it that some democracies tolerate corrupt governments with more equanimity? Is it just economic prosperity that shapes the government's public image? Or does the level of uncertainty affect the public perception of government misconduct? Do actors have agency to portray the misconduct in more positive terms, or their actions constrained by the institutional and political environment?

Lastly, the proposed research excites my imagination. It is inter-theoretical and comparative. Now that I believe to have found a way to make it feasible as well, I am confident that I can accomplish it.

## Bibliography

Abramovitz, Alan. "Incumbency, Campaign Spending, and the Decline of Competition in the U.S. House elections," *Journal of Politics* 53 (2001): 34-56.

Adut, Ari. "Scandal as Norm Entrepreneurship Strategy: Corruption and the French Investigating Magistrates," *Theory and Society* 33/5 (2004): 529 – 578.

Ahuja, Sunil. "Modern Theory Meets the 1992 House Elections," *Political Research Quarterly* 47/4 (1994): 909-921.

Alesander, Jeffrey. *Culture and Political Crisis. Watergate and Durkheimian Sociology*. Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Anderson, Christopher. "Economic Voting and Political Context: a Comparative Perspective," *Electoral Studies* 19 (2000): 150-171.

Anderson, Christopher.. "Look at All Those Nouns in a Row: Authoritarianism, Democracy, and the Iconicity of Political Russia," *Political Communication* 13/2 (1996): 145-164.

Anderson, Christopher. "*Metaphors of Dictatorship and Democracy: Change in the Russian Political Lexicon and the Transformation of Russian Politics*":

<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/polisci/faculty/anderson/Metaphor13.htm>.

Barker, Anthony. 1997. "Practising to Deceive: Whitehall, Arms Exports and Scott Inquiry," *Political Quarterly* 68/1 (1997): 41-49.

Bennett, William. *The Death of Outrage. Bill Clinton and the Assault on the American Ideals*. New York: Touchstone Book, 1998.

Birkland, Thomas. *After Disaster. Agenda Setting, Public Policy and Focusing Events*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1997.

Brock, David. *The Republican Media Noise Machine*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2004.

Bovens Mark and Hart Paul. *Understanding Policy Fiascoes*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1995.

Burg, Tamara. "Off with Their Heads! Scandal, White House Staff Turnover, and Its Implications for the Presidential Policy Making" (Senior Thesis, Harvard University, Department of Government, 2004).

Bull/Newell. *Corruption in Contemporary Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Capella, Joseph and Kathleen Jamieson. *The Spiral of Cynicism: The Press and the Public Good*. New York: Oxford, 1997.

Cazzola, Franco. "Storia e Anatomia della Corruzione in Italia," *Argomenti* 50 (1993).

Cepernich, Christopher. "Media and Political Scandals in Italy. Mistrust on Ground of Antipolitics" presented at the 29th ECPR Joint Session, 2002.

Chalaby, Jean. "Scandal and the Rise of Investigative Reporting in France," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/9 (2004): 1194-1207.

Chanley, Virginia and Thomas Rudolf. "The Origins and Consequences of Public Trust in Government," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 64 (2000): 239-256.

Clark, Anna. *Scandal. The Sexual Politics of the British Constitution*. Princeton. University Press, 2004.

Collins, Gail. *Scorpion Tongues. The Irresistible History of Gossip in American Politics*," Orlando: Harvest Book, 1999.

Dobratz, Betty. "Does Scandal Influence Voters' Party Preferences? The Case of Greece During the Papandreou Era," *European Sociological Review* 8/2 (1992):167-180.

Durkheim, Emile. *The Division of Labor in Society*. New York: The Free Press, 1984.



- Davis, James. "System Cynicism in Twenty Contemporary Nations," paper presented for Kennedy School Workshop: Confidence in Democratic Institutions, 1997.
- Doig, Alan. "Sleaze: Picking Up the Threads or 'Back to Basics' Scandals?," *Parliamentary Affairs* 54 (2001): 360-375.
- Eagly, Alice. "Why Would Anybody Say That? Causal Attributions of Statements About the Watergate Scandal," *Sociometry* 39/3 (1976): 236-243.
- Edelmann, Murray. *Constructing the Political Spectacle*. Chicago: University Press of Chicago, 1988.
- Jarren, Otfried, Heribert Schatz and Hartmut Wessler "Von der Anprangerung zum Skandal. Konsensbildung im Fall Werner Hofer" in *Medien und Politischer Prozess. Politische Öffentlichkeit und Massenmediale Politikvermittlung im Wandel*, Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1996.
- Fakhar, Ahlam and Michael Rimler. "Computational Methods to Measure the Life of a News Scandal," online: <http://zia.hss.cmu.edu/econ/homework02/4/index.html>.
- Funk, Carolyn. "Person Perception of Politicians Involved in Scandal" (PhD dissertation, UCLA, 1993).
- Gabner, George. "Living with the Television: the Violence Profile," *Journal of Communication* 26/1 (1976): 173-199.
- Garment, Suzanne. *Scandal. The Culture of Mistrust in American Politics*. Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1992.
- Geiger/Steinbach. "Auswirkung Politischer Skandale auf die Karriere der Skandalisierten" in *Medien und Politischer Prozess. Politische Öffentlichkeit und Massenmediale Politikvermittlung im Wandel*," Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag: 119-137.
- Ginsborg, Paul. *Silvio Berlusconi. Television, Power and Patrimony*. New York: Verso, 2004.
- Hibbing John and Theiss-Morse Elizabeth. *What is it about Government that Americans Dislike?* Cambridge University Press. 2001.
- Holler Manfred and Wickstroem, "The Scandal Matrix: The Use of Scandals in the Progress of Society", working paper 159 for the Center of Economic Studies, Muenchen.
- Habermas, Juergen. *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1996.
- Holmes/Pujas. "Corruption Scandals and Party Financing in France and Russia: Comparing Italy, Spain and France" in *Political Corruption: Concepts and Scandals*, ed. A. J. Heidenheimer and M. Johnston, London: Transaction Publishers, 2002:739-760.
- Hood, Christopher. "The Risk Game and the Blame Game," *Government and Opposition* (2002): 15-37.
- Hood, Christopher. "Institutions, Blame Avoidance and Negativity Bias: Where Public Management Reform Meets the 'Blame Culture,'" paper for CMPO Conference, Great Britain, 2004.
- Jacobson, Gary. "Impeachment Politics in the 1998 Congressional Elections," *Political Science Quarterly* 114/1 (1999): 31-51.
- Jones, Jeffrey. 2003. "Historical Favorability Ratings of Presidents," online: <http://www.gallup.com/poll/content/default.aspx?ci=8938>.
- Kaesler, Dirk. *Der Politische Skandal*. Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991.
- Kious, Spiro. "Job Approval and Favorability: The Impact of Media Attention to the Monica Lewinsky Scandal on Public Opinion of President Bill Clinton," *Mass Communication and Society* 4/4 (2003): 435-451.
- Klite, Paul. "TV News and the Culture of Violence" in *Rocky Mountain Media Watch*, 1999.
- Kohn, George. *The New Encyclopedia of American Scandal*. New York: Checkmark Books, 1997.
- Krastev, Ivan. *Shifting Obsessions*. Budapest: Central European University, 2004.
- Liebes, Tamar. "It Takes Two to Blow the Whistle," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/9 (2004): 1153-1170.
- Lyons, Gene. *Fools for Scandal. How the Media Invented Whitewater*. New York: Franklin Square Press, 1996.
- Lyons, Gene and Joe Conason. *The Hunting of the President. The Ten year Campaign to Destroy Bill and Hilary Clinton*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Maravall, Jose Maria. "Political Accountability and Party Democracy," online: [www.yale.edu/las/conference/papers/Maravall.pdf](http://www.yale.edu/las/conference/papers/Maravall.pdf).
- Mancuso, Maureen. "A Thousand Brooms, A Thousand Buckets: Accountability and Institutional Investigation of Scandal" in *Canadian Review of American Studies* 32 (2002).
- McLeod, Jack. "Watergate and the 1974 Congressional Elections," *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 41/2 (1977): 181-195.
- Miller, William, Ase Grodeland, and Tatyana Koshechkina. *A Culture of Corruption*. Central European University Press, 2001.

Morlino, Leonardo and Marco Tarchi. "The Dissatisfied Society: the Roots of Political Change in Italy," *European Journal of Political Research* 30 (1996): 41-63.

Mueller, John. "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson," *American Political Science Review* 64 (1970): 18-34.

Patterson, Thomas. *Out of Order*. New York: Random House, 1994.

Pasquino Gianfranco. *The End of Post-War Politics in Italy*. Westview Press, 1993.

Portman, John. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Ridley, F.F. "Feet of Clay: Threat of the Temples of Democracy," *Parliamentary Affairs* 36 (1996): 617-631.

Sears, David and Carolyn Funk. "The Limited Effect of Economic Self-Interest on the Political Attitudes of the Mass Public," *Journal of Behavioral Economics* 19/3 (1990): 247-271.

Shaw, Daron. "Strong Persuasion? The Effect of Campaigns in the U.S. Presidential Elections" (Ph.D. dissertation, UCLA, 1995).

Stoker, Laura. "Judging Presidential Character: The Demise of Hary Grant," *Political Behavior* 15/2 (1993):193-23.

Taylor, Charles. *Modern Social Imaginaries*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2004.

Tester, Keith. *Media, Culture and Morality*. New York: Routledge, 1994.

Thomson, Denis. "Ascribing Responsibility to Advisors in Government," *Ethics* 93/3 (1993): 546-560.

Tiffen, Rodney. *Scandals: Media, Politics and Corruption in Contemporary Australia*. Sidney, Australia: UNSW Press, 1999.

Tiffen, Rodney. "Tip of the Iceberg of Moral Panic?," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/9 (2004): 1171-1193.

Turber, James. "Representation, Accountability, and Efficiency in Divided Party Control of Government," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 24 (1991): 653-657.

Zaller, John. *Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Waisbond, Silvio. "Scandals, Media and Citizenship in Contemporary Argentina," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/9 (2004): 1072-1098.

Williams, Bruce and Michael Caprini. "Monica and Bill All the Time and Everywhere," *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/9 (2004): 1208-1230.

### 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.<sup>82</sup>

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."<sup>83</sup>

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."<sup>84</sup>

<sup>82</sup> John Thompson. "Scandal and Social Theory," in *Media Scandals*, ed. Lull and Hinerman, New York: Columbia University Press, 1997: 39.

<sup>83</sup> Anthony King. "Sex, Money and Power," in *Politics in Britain and the United States*. Comparative Perspectives, Durham: Duke University Press, 1986: 175.

<sup>84</sup> Jimenez, p.1100.

Schudson quotes Thompson to indicate scandals mean “struggles over symbolic power, in which reputation and trust are at stake.”<sup>85</sup>

Funk uses scandal as a: “shortcut for publicized behaviors by a politician that are in conflict with society’s moral standards.”<sup>86</sup>

Lowi is more succinct: “Scandal is corruption revealed. Scandal is a breach of virtue exposed.”<sup>87</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> Michael Schudson. “Notes on Scandal and the Watergate Legacy,” *American Behavioral Scientist* 47/9 (2004): 1237.

<sup>86</sup> Carolyn Funk. “The Impact of Scandal on Candidate Evaluations: An Experimental Test of the Role of Candidate Traits,” *Political Behavior* 18/1 (1996): 2.

<sup>87</sup> Lowi, “Politics of Scandal,” 6.

## Appendix 2.

Table 1: Three basic accountability syndromes

Accountability Syndromes and Subtypes	Spatial Representation
Subordinate vertical	
Hierarchical accountability	
0 Elite controlling vertical	
1 Electoral accountability	
2 Reputational accountability	
Horizontal	
Legislative accountability	
Legal accountability	

**Table 2.** Accountability mechanisms and the corresponding mechanisms, catalysts, and signals

Accountability Syndromes	Accountability Mechanisms	Principal: Public or Legislature	Agent: Executive	Sanctioning Mechanism	Tentative Catalysts	Signal
Subordinate vertical	Hierarchical	Prime Minister	Government Members	Dismissal	Coalition Cabinet	Media
Elite Controlling Vertical	Electoral	Electorate	Government	Electoral Defeat	Economy, Culture, Party Competition	Media
	Public Reputational	Diffuse Public	Government	Low approval ratings	Economy, Culture	Media
Horizontal	Supervisory	Congress Parliament	Cabinet	Impeachment Committees	Interest groups "fire alarms"	Media
	Legal	Courts/ Independent Counsel	Government	Impeachment	Counsel's party affiliation	Media



**Table 6.** Classification of institutional investigations

1. EXECUTIVE GOVERNMENT'S PROCESS	1
Internal: by an individual official	1.1
Internal: by a committee, board, group or audit department	1.2
External: inquiry by one person	1.3
External: a judge or other lawyer	1.3a
External: other person	1.3b
External: "public inquiry by a commission or a committee	1.4
External: commission charged by a judge	1.4a
External: no judge involved	1.4b
External: judicial tribunal already provided for by law	1.5
LEGISLATURE'S PROCESSES	2
Existing permanent ("standing") committee of legislature	2.1
Ad hoc, special committee of the legislature	2.2
JUDICIAL PROCESSES	3
Criminal: indictment, trial conviction, appeal	3.1
Civil: legal action, inquest	3.2
INTERNATIONAL Investigations	4

Source: Anthony Baker 1994

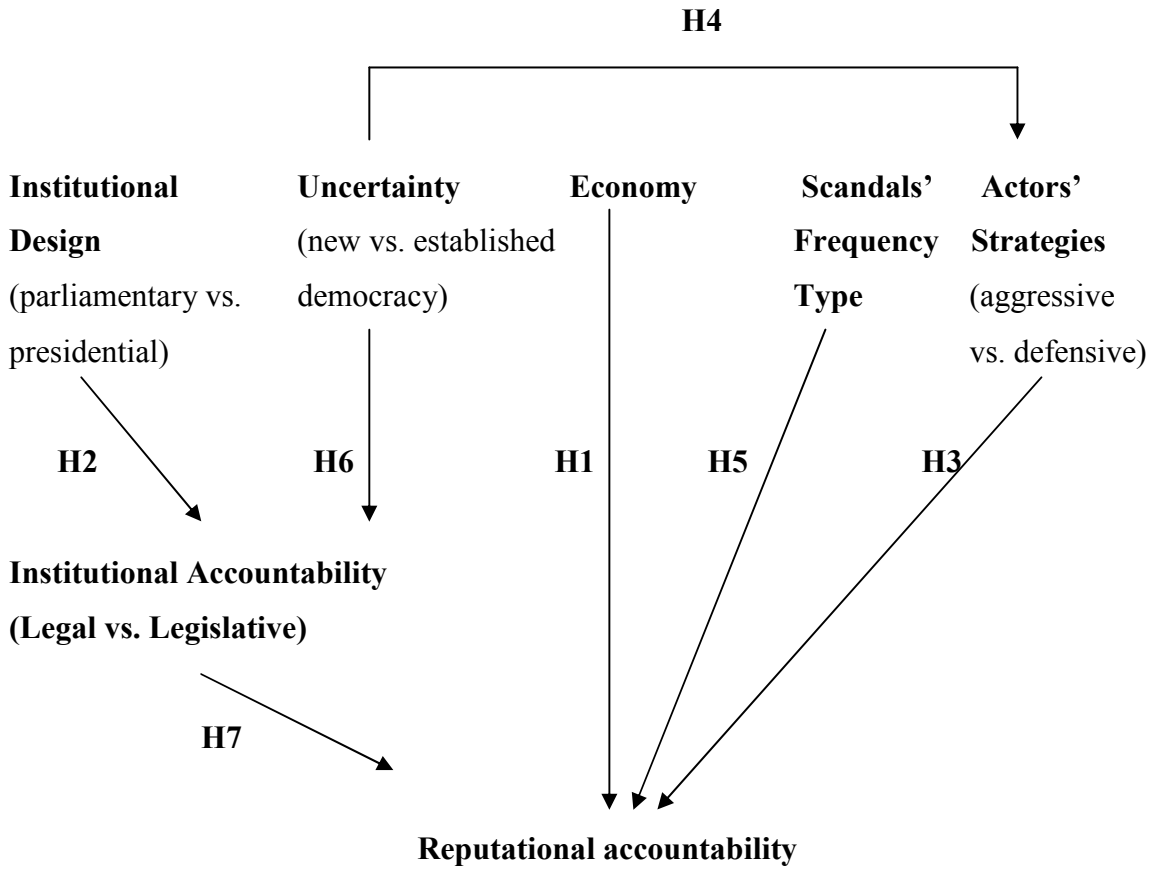
**Table 7.** Types of elite's tactics in responding to scandalous allegations

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

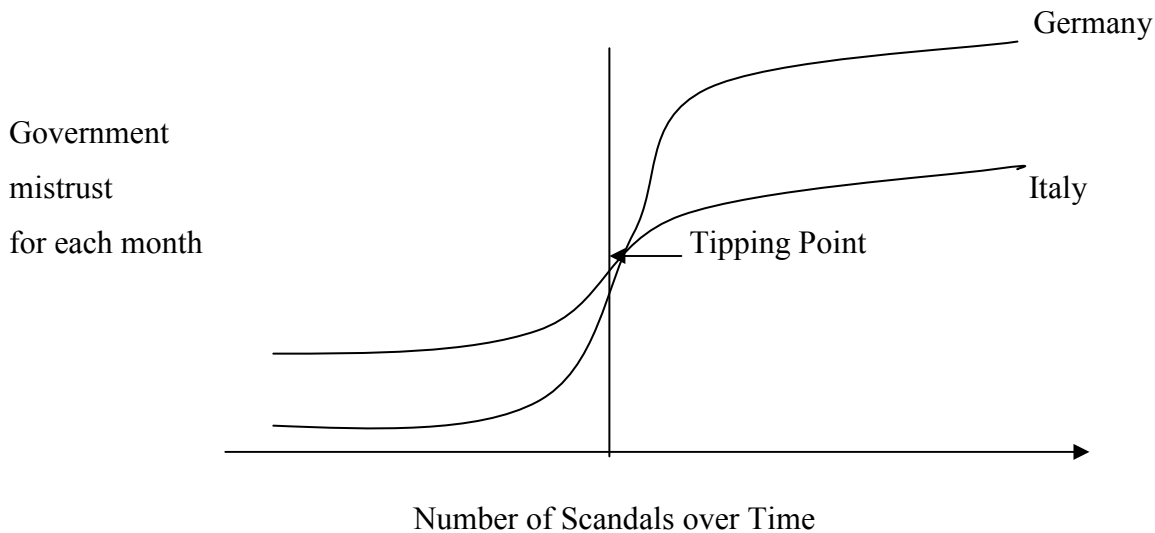
Source: Astrid Schuetz, 1998.



**Graph 1.** Reputation of institutional, hierarchical and reputational accountability

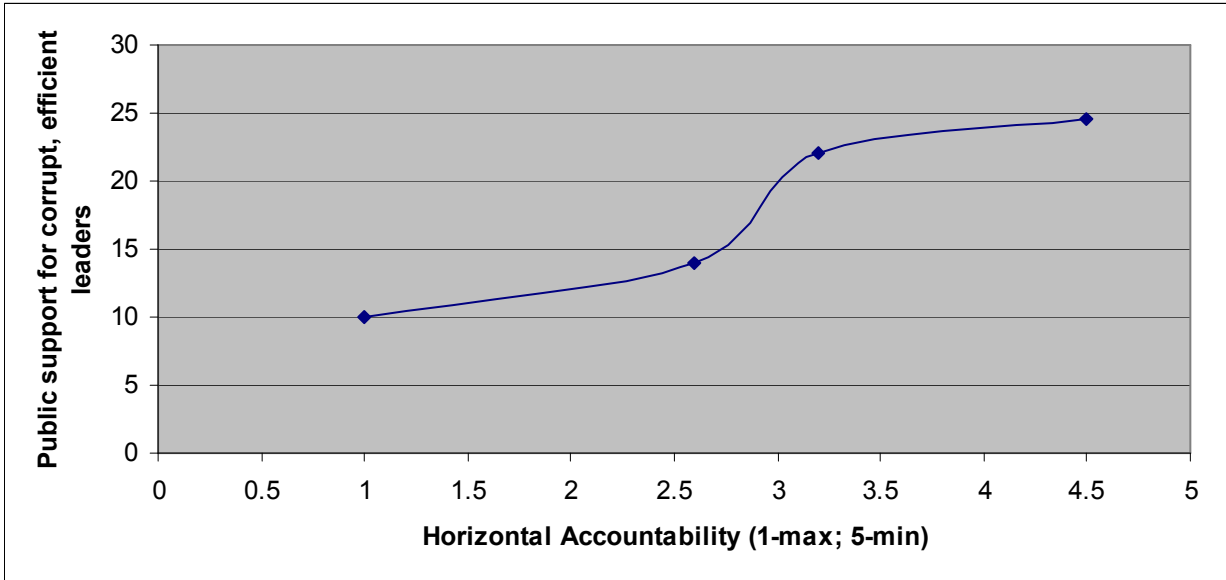


**Graph 2.** Hypothesized effect of legislative and legal sanctioning on the government's reputation



The slope indicates the degree of legal and legislative accountability.

**Graph 3.** Correlation between blame visibility and public support for corrupt government



Sources: Holmes 2001, Whitten/Powell index of blame visibility 1993