Scandal Fatigue: Scandal Elections and Satisfaction with Democracy in Western Europe 1977-2007

Staffan Kumlin

Peter Esaiasson

Abstract

We combine Eurobarometer surveys with contextual data from 19 countries and three decades, and find that elections are increasingly associated with major scandals. In the late 1970s few elections were associated with major scandals whereas today 40-50 percent are. Further, looking at the entire period, both recent and past scandal elections have had long-term negative (rather than positive) net effects on satisfaction with democracy. However, as scandals have become more common—at different rates in different countries—the once negative net effect has withered away. This "scandal fatigue syndrome" appears driven both by changes in the composition of scandal elections (multi-actor scandal elections still have negative effects but have not become more common), as well as by larger heterogeneity in effects (single-actor scandal elections used to be inconsequential but gradually assume positive effects as scandal elections become more common). The concluding section discusses possible interpretations and implications.

Staffan Kumlin
The Quality of Government Institute
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
Box 711
405 30 Göteborg, Sweden
staffan.kumlin@pol.gu.se

Peter Esaiasson
Department of Political Science
University of Gothenburg
Box 711
405 30 Göteborg, Sweden
peter.esaiasson@pol.gu.se

The unspoken premise of a political scandal is that a contract between citizens and their representatives has been violated. Citizens learn that one or more individuals entrusted with the right to make collective decisions is publicly accused of morally or legally unacceptable actions. If citizens believe the accusation is well-founded they might conclude that bad conduct is typical for politics. Scandals are thus potential threats not only to besmirched politicians but also to more general trust in representative democracy.

But it is also conceivable that some scandals in some contexts *strengthen* political trust. This would be the case if, perhaps after an initial reaction of anger and frustration, citizens conclude that the system as a whole functions well. Individuals might be crossing the line but media watchdogs and responsible politicians make sure wrongdoers are exposed and dealt with. Alternatively, citizens might sometimes take sides with politicians if they see accusations as unfounded, irrelevant, and exaggerated, so that they obstruct high-quality election campaigns and public discourse. Yet other scandals may be inconsequential for trust. This could happen if expectations on politicians are already low, or if citizens have become so accustomed to scandals that more of the same does not produce attitude change.

This paper investigates (1) if elections in Western democracies have become increasingly associated with scandals, (2) if and how scandal elections stimulate generalizations about the functioning of democracy, (3) if the strength and direction of such effects change over time as scandal elections have allegedly multiplied, and (4) whether effects are

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systematically different depending on the number of actors and parties that are simultaneously scandalized.

In the next two sections we discuss previous research and hypotheses about what to expect in terms of trends in scandal elections and their effects. We then move on to issues of definition, measurement and data, and eventually the empirical analysis. The concluding section discusses wider interpretations implications of the findings.

Media and the scandalization of politics

According to Theodore Lowi (1988) scandals "are corruption revealed." As discussed below we conceptualize the relationship between scandal and corruption somewhat differently—not all instances of corruption are potential political scandals, and not all scandals are instances of alleged corruption—but he is right in emphasizing the importance of publicity for political scandals. This means that the media is a key actor in the process (Thompson 2000).

Media researchers have for long observed that the relationship between journalists and politicians has changed in past decades. "Medialization" (e.g. Swanson and Mancini 1996), "New Media Logic" (e.g. Altheide and Snow 1979), and "Media as the Fourth Branch of Government" (Cook 1998) are conceptual summaries of developmental trends in most, if not all, Western democracies. At the heart of these ideas lies the notion that the media has become an independent political actor with an agenda of its own. To their

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Specifically, we address three empirical questions: (1) have scandals become more common themes in West European election campaigns during the past decades?, (2) what is the impact of scandal-ridden election contexts on satisfaction with democracy?, and (3) are such effects increasing or decreasing in strength over time as the number of scandal elections have accumulated?¶
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The information on scandals and scandal elections comes from expert election analyses published in two political science journals. We combine this macro information with micro-level Eurobarometer data collected after parliamentary elections in respective European country. We use three-level multilevel modeling of the effects of exposure to electoral contexts marked by scandals on satisfaction with democracy.¶

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more or less openly expressed dislike, politicians have been forced to adapt to a media-centered context of communication (e.g. McNair 2000; Meyer 2002).

Also the type of information disseminated to citizens has changed. Journalists are prone towards emphasizing strategic and conflictual aspects of politics, to focus on individuals rather than on political structures, and to take the position of a watchdog protecting the interests of citizens against powerful politicians (e.g. Patterson 1993; Bennett 1996; Capella and Jamieson 1997). Moreover, due to increasingly complex news media structures, and shortened news cycles, the amount of political information available to citizens has multiplied. Recently, new communications technologies have fostered an even more personalized and conflictual political coverage (Owen 2000). Of importance here is that political scandals fit perfectly into the currently dominating media format (Tumber and Waisbord 2004; Johansson 2006). Specifically, the developments in the relations between the media and politics lead to the *Scandalization-of-elections hypothesis.*

> (H1): Over time, scandals have become more common and prominent themes in election campaigns.

Scandals and political trust: past research

While it seems clear that major scandals can hamper support for involved politicians (De Sousa 2001), and at least occasionally parties and governments (but see Maravall 2007; Midtbø 2007), the impact of scandals on general political trust is less researched (Bowler

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and Karp 2004). For sure, many citizens believe politicians are prone towards immoral and illegal behaviour (e.g. Klingemann 1999; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002; Dalton 2004). What is less clear, however, is the development of scandals as a general phenomenon over time, and the extent to which mistrust actually emanates from reported behaviour of politicians.

The most closely related large-N comparative evidence comes concerns how citizens in different countries react to corruption, a real-world problem underlying some but not all political scandals. In particular, Anderson and Tverdova (2003) show that higher levels of perceived societal corruption are negatively associated with different forms of political trust. Such findings are valuable but by definition only partly relevant for our understanding of scandals. Is information about scandal-material such as corruption mainly communicated to citizens through everyday experience with the functioning of lower level government officials or also through major public election scandals involving politicians and high-rank officials such as those under study here?

A few major American scandals have been thoroughly scrutinized. Miller (1999) studied the Clinton-Lewinsky affair using cross-sectional data. He concluded that its effects on both presidential popularity and general political trust were negligible. The explanations included highly partisan perceptions of the scandal, dissatisfaction with exaggerated media coverage and biased investigators, as well as a public whose evaluations of leaders tend to be multidimensional and differentiated (Owen 2000). Smyth and Taylor's (2003) time-series analysis of monthly popularity data sustain these findings. Analyzing both

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Watergate and Lewinsky, they find scandal effects to be either absent or at least much smaller than those of economic performance.

In one of relatively few studies that focus explicitly on general political trust, Bowler and Karp (2004) examine the impact of the congressional "House Bank" scandal of the 1990s. They find that distrust in Congress is associated with knowledge about this scandal, and that distrust was greater in districts where congressmen wrote more "bad checks." Moreover, Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn (2000) provide the most complete American evidence that at least major scandals can affect general political trust. The authors combine quarterly time-series data on trust with information on the timing of eight major scandals throughout the 1980s and 1990s. The results suggest congressional scandals hamper both trust in congress as well as general trust, whereas presidential scandals tend to hurt mainly specific presidential approval.

In the European context, Kepplinger (1996) reports that the German terms "Skandal" and "Affäre" became more frequent in the index of Der Spiegel between 1950 and 1989. In the same edited volume, Fridrichsen (1996) studied a series of scandals during Germany's "Superwahljahr" of 1994. Extensive media content analyses revealed nine major scandals during this year. These were all rather short-lived in terms of media attention but produced short-term spikes in the public's interest in scandals. However, the outbreak of scandals did not contribute to the perception that scandals and political mistrust are important problems. There was in a few cases a positive effect of being interested in a particular scandal and supporting newer and less established parties, as

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well as perceiving political mistrust as a societal problem. In a similar vein, Oscarsson and Holmberg (2008) measured politically mistrusting Swedes' subjective explanations of their own mistrust. Around 15 percent mentioned scandals and affairs, making this one of the more common subjective accounts.

In the French context, an experimental study reports that psychology students who were reminded of ex-minister Roland Dumas, and who were already highly knowledgeable about the ELF scandal to which he is linked, were less generally trusting in politicians than other students (Régner and Lefloch 2005). Likewise, Bowler and Karp (2004) analysed the 2001 UK election and find less trust in constituencies with scandalized MPs. Similarly, in an essay on corruption in Portugal De Sousa (2001:171, 78) argued that the 1995 election "showed how corruption can lead to the collapse of a party in power," and reports survey results showing that "Since 1993, when the PSD majority started to be rocked by scandals of corruption and financial impropriety, citizens belief in the works of democracy declined."

Studying scandals and their effects

The literature review suggests that studies examining scandal effects on political trust have usually found a negative impact of some significance. However, the review also suggests a number of typical research design features. Taken together, we argue, these features call for further investigation.

Most obviously, researchers have often relied on a "single-country-few scandals-approach." Often only one scandal has been examined. This is hardly a coincidence, but rather emblematic of political communication research more generally. While already in the 1970s there were calls for more comparative research (Blumler and Gurevitch 1975), some argue that they have rarely been heeded (De Vreese 2003; Strömbäck and Aalberg 2008; van Kempen 2008).

Such studies are valuable as they illuminate ramifications of major historical events. But the approach can also be problematic if we wish to understand scandals as a general phenomenon. For instance, the design may produce a biased view of scandal effects if scholars are likely to focus on single scandals that have already gone down in history, while slightly smaller scandals are neglected. Furthermore, concentrating on one scandal at the time by definition excludes any effects of *accumulations* of several scandals, or that such accumulations interact with the impact of future scandals. As our theory and data will suggest, past scandals can continue to play a role as they enter our "collective scandal memory," as revived by the media and citizens themselves during election campaigns. Similarly, the impact of new scandals may be different depending on the nature of scandal history.

Further, the single-scandal design often forces researchers to use individual-level independent variables, such as respondent's knowledge about, or perceptions of, a single scandal (e.g., Friedrichsen 1996; Miller 1999; Bowler and Karp 2004). Such designs are sensitive to chicken-and-egg causality problems. But more than this, they leave out the

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possibility that scandal effects operate at a more contextual level. From this vantage point, trust differences may be found between scandal-ridden and scandal-free contexts, just as much as between citizens who are (unequally) exposed to the same scandal-ridden context.

Moreover, several past studies have dealt with simultaneous or short-term effects. This is true for studies analysing individual-level effects of single scandals using survey data (e.g. Miller 1999), for experimental designs (Régner and Lefloch 2005), as well as for studies modelling the impact of a somewhat larger number of scandals using time-series analysis (e.g. Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Smyth and Taylor 2003) or within-country geographical variation (e.g. Bowler and Karp 2004). While short-term effects are certainly interesting, we focus on more long-term effects, as measured some months after elections. Scandal effects on political trust are arguably of (even) greater interest if citizens draw more lasting and deeply engrained conclusions.

A final feature of past research is that elections have played a modest role. Scholars have usually studied the impact of major scandals whenever they occur in the electoral cycle (e.g. Miller 1999; Chanley, Rudolph, and Rahn 2000; Smyth and Taylor; but see Bowler and Karp 2004). However, whereas the typical between-election scandal is reported as a stand-alone event, are results will suggest that election campaigns often allow several old and new scandals to (re)surface simultaneously. This is interesting not least as election campaigns tend to boost political interest, and change views of the political system (e.g. Anderson, Blais, Bowler, Donovan, and Listhaug 2005). There is systematic evidence

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that elections in Western democracies, when performed according to the standards expected by citizens, typically help to build political support among citizens (Ginsberg and Weisberg 1978; Finkel 1985, 1987; Holmberg 1999; Esaiasson 2007). From this point of view, scandal elections become interesting as they may constitute missed opportunities for democracies to legitimize and revitalize themselves.

Hypotheses about the impact of scandal elections on political trust

We noted previously that scandals may theoretically both erode and build trust. Still, we have yet to identify a single publication where researchers report that scandals—through adequate system responses to individual misbehavior—have positive effects (see Kepplinger 1996, for a similar remark). Instead, most studies report either no or negative (short-term) effects. However, we keep an eye out for both possibilities.

(H2a): On balance, scandal elections tend to *erode* political trust.

(H2b): On balance, scandal elections tend to *strengthen* political trust.

In testing H2a and b, we consider the impact of recent scandal elections as well as the accumulated number of *past* scandal elections, assuming that past events can continue to be remembered and debated during later campaigns.

But we also consider interactions between scandal history and recent events. Here there are two directly conflicting hypotheses, both of which assume that scandals have become more commonplace. On the one hand we test the *scandal priming hypothesis*. As citizens

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increasingly face scandal-oriented campaigns, they might consider new information along the same lines to be extra important. As the name suggests, it draws on priming theory (e.g. Iyengar and Kinder 1987), under which the topics and themes prioritized by the mass media weigh heavier in evaluations of actors, issues, and institutions.

On the other hand we have the alternative *scandal fatigue hypothesis*. It assumes that citizens ascribe less importance to scandals as these become more common and cumulate over time. This can in turn be the result of two related processes. First, scandal fatigue may operate through the composition of scandal material. This is the case if journalists must resort to more idiosyncratic and less democratically relevant stories to satisfy their growing scandal appetite. Citizens are then increasingly provided with peripheral scandal material of a type that did not even matter at the outset. This alone should attenuate scandal effects. More than this, however, also effects of comparable contexts and events may change. For example, citizens may increasingly question the messenger and conclude that journalists are increasingly constructing or exaggerating scandal material. Alternatively, citizens may become desensitized to scandals because moral expectations of politicians are lowered, or because the marginal informational utility of yet another scandal is low ("I already knew they're crooked").

To sum up:

> (H3a): As the number of past scandal elections accumulate over time, the effect of yet another scandal election is magnified (the *scandal priming hypothesis*).

Borttaget: The scandal priming hypothesis is also akin to the "personalization of politics" thesis alluded to above. It has been shown that a larger share of political coverage and debate is now occupied by individual politicians, as opposed to their parties (McAllister 2006). This observation has led to the prediction that evaluations of leaders are increasingly affecting party choice. Interestingly, however, this latter prediction has not fared well empirically (e.g. Curtice and Holmberg 2005)

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Borttaget: Finally, given the often obvious internal struggle for influence between media representatives and politicians, citizens may increasingly question the messenger. They may conclude that journalists are increasingly looking for, and are perhaps exaggerating, scandal material.¶

(H3b): As the number of past scandal elections accumulate over time, the effect of yet another scandal election is attenuated (the *scandal fatigue hypothesis)*.

How homogenous are effects of scandal elections?

So far we have discussed scandal elections as one broad category, with no consideration of the variation within it. However, this paper moves beyond an entirely unitary approach and also explores the effects of subcategories of scandals. Scandals, and scandal elections, are naturally different from each other along systematic variables. The comparative approach employed here allows us to examine this variation.

In principle, this opens up a Pandora's box of variables about involved actors, subject matter, and the legal/political consequences, to mention a few. Our specific contribution here, however, is to zoom in on one particular systematic factor that is central to our argument about elections. Specifically, we noted that election campaigns are interesting as they potentially allow *several* old and new scandals to (re)surface simultaneously. Whenever this happens it should create a more genuine scandal *context* in which citizens can connect otherwise separate events to each other. However, the actual degree of generalizability will vary across scandal contexts. As we shall see, some scandal elections only concern a single politician, whereas others are defined by multiple scandals, politicians, and parties. Hence:

H4: The impact of scandal elections on political trust is magnified when scandal elections concern multiple politicians and parties.

Measurement and data

We will combine contextual data on elections and scandals with microlevel Eurobarometer surveys. Eurobarometer surveys are biannual opinion polls conducted on behalf of the European Commission in all EU member states. Data from the most often repeated survey items have been compiled in the "Mannheim Eurobarometer trend file" (see Schmitt, Scholz, Leim, and Moschner 2005) which is distributed by The Central Archive for Empirical Social Research (ZA) in Cologne. This data set is by far the most encompassing and suitable given our purposes, but it still gives only contains one indicator of generalized, national-level, political trust: "On the whole, would you say that you are very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy is functioning in [COUNTRY]."

Critics of this often used survey item point out that its precise meaning is unclear. Does it measure overall democratic performance, trust in specific institutions, trust in politicians, support for democratic principles, or some mixture of these (Canache, Mondak, and Seligson 2001; Linde and Ekman 2003)? Its defenders agree that the meaning is unclear but maintain its usefulness as an overall measure of subjective legitimacy and trust (Klingemann 1999; Anderson 2002; Blais and Gélineau 2007). Given our interest in broad generalizations from specific events, our position is that multiple measures and finer distinctions would be desirable but are not absolutely crucial as long as we capture much of the broad category of general political trust.

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The contextual data on scandal elections were drawn from *West European Politics* and *Electoral Studies*. These academic journals have published election reports since 1977 and 1982 respectively. All in all, we coded 153 reported West European parliamentary elections in 19 countries between 1977 and 2007.[1] West European Politics covered 151 of these whereas Electoral Studies covered 116. The reports were read and checked for the mentioning of scandals defined as: "A sequence of events in which significant public attention is focused on alleged illegal, immoral or otherwise inappropriate conduct by identifiable politicians or high-rank officials."

As illustrated by the election scandals listed in appendix B, the definition is inclusive in that it captures a broad array of alleged events such as corruption, party/campaign finance, private financial misconduct, lying, stealing, drunk-driving, and occasionally sex. It is inclusive because our interest is directed towards political scandals as a *general* phenomenon. Given our ambition to move beyond the "one scandal one context," design we believe it is relevant to focus on all types of events that qualify according to a general definition.

However, the definition is not all-inclusive with respect to events that may be associated with the terms "scandals" and "affairs." For example, one main type of critical event that falls outside our scope of interest is bad policy performance and decision-making. Failure to act upon naturally caused disasters such as earth quakes, hurricanes and tsunamis is a case in point; mismanagement of the economy regarding regulation of the finance market is another.

Appendix A provides an overview of the covered elections and registers whether they are "scandal elections" judging from the reports. Appendix B contains a list of specific scandals with keywords that will give country specialists a feeling for the types of events present in the data.

The data can be said to measure two ideal-type election scandals thus defined. First, and most obviously, they capture scandals that are initially revealed in close proximity to the election. Second, the data frequently allow older scandals to reemerge at election time in one way or another, either manifestly on the public/media agenda or as a generally suspected causal factor that continue to play a role in opinion formation or political communication. In fact, only 22 percent of scandal elections registered in both journals exclusively concern scandals that broke during the campaign.

In principle, there are no guarantees that experts are using the same definition as we do. However, in practice the reports were usually explicit enough to make it possible to determine directly from the text whether the expert mentioned scandals that fitted our particular definition. Occasionally however, he/she would make more vague references to "a series of scandals" or "affairs." In such cases, we used additional sources such as major newspapers and databases like Wikipedia to determine whether the election campaign was associated with scandals fitting our definition.

Of course, to some basic extent all election campaigns are associated with scandals. It is simply unlikely that the media and the main contenders do not touch on at least some alleged misbehavior at some point. The scandals we expect the reports to capture, however, should be more significant than those minor scandal distractions that invariably surface around election time. After all, the reports are written by professional scholars/political scientists with an analytic/historical focus and a limited number of pages at their disposal.

We used two strategies to gauge the validity of the independent scandal variables. First, we compared the classification of elections (scandal or not) resulting from reports in the two journals respectively. There is strong but not absolute agreement between the two: 86 percent of the 114 elections with two reports were classified in the same way. When analyzing the impact of scandal elections on satisfaction with democracy we will generally use an independent variable coded 1 if both journals mention scandals and 0 for all other cases.

A second strategy involved comparing our list of election scandals with the scandals discussed in three book-long publications on scandals.[2] These sources allowed us to construct an independent list of major political scandals for about half of the countries in our sample for at least part of the thirty years covered. We find that all scandals mentioned in election reports were discussed in at least one the sources, indicating that reports tend to mention scandals of some relevance and magnitude.

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Borttaget: On the other hand, the fact that we cover many elections in many countries means that we also move beyond the small group of potentially unrepresentative, once-in-a-century scandals that have inspired quite some past research (Watergate, Lewinsky etc.)¶

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The rise of scandals elections

More often than not over the time period covered, Europeans have chosen their representatives without being primed about the major scandals that make their way into expert analyses of elections.[3] At least one scandal is mentioned in at least one journal in 39 percent of the 153 parliamentary elections for which we have at least one expert report. When we apply the more demanding criterion that there shall be two expert reports and that both shall mention scandals, the corresponding figure is 30 percent (n=114).

To test H1, Figure 1 reports the proportion of scandal elections—as measured by at least one expert discussing scandals—by six time periods. The results clearly support the hypothesis. In the beginning of the time period, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, elections were rarely associated with scandals. More recently, roughly between 40 and 50 percent are.[5]

[FIGURE 1: ABOUT HERE]

Specifically, the data indicate a continuing increase up until the late 1990s, with a major shift taking place in the late 1980s. The current time period is the first for which the proportion of scandal elections is lower than in the preceding period. Although there is a statistically significant trend in the data ($b_{time\ period}$=.06; SE=.028; p<.05), pairwise comparisons of the time periods show that most later differences are statistically insignificant (difference of proportion tests). The cautious conclusion is that European

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election campaigns changed fundamentally in the mid-1980s, and that following variations are more random.

The rise of scandal elections is not driven by particular countries. Figure 2 shows that the basic pattern of an increase in scandal elections from the early period to the late period is found in 15 of 19 countries. Only Austria, Denmark, Finland and Italy experienced a different type of development in which scandals were a more common theme in the campaigns of the late 1970s and early 1980s. In Austria and Italy the level of scandalous campaigns was high in the early period, whereas in Denmark and Finland scandal elections have been relatively uncommon during both periods.

[FIGURE 2: ABOUT HERE]

Scandal elections and satisfaction with democracy

Table 1 displays estimates of multilevel models with three hierarchically ordered levels: *individuals* in *post-election contexts* in *countries*. The dependent variable is the individual respondent's satisfaction with democracy as measured usually one Eurobarometer wave after the elections.[6] The lag is introduced as we seek to assess the medium/long-term impact of scandals, as opposed to the short-term or simultaneous effects that have been the target of most previous studies. The dependent variable varies between 1 and 4, with higher values indicating greater satisfaction.[7]

Model 1 is an "empty" variance components model that lacks a fixed part containing independent variables. Instead, it only estimates a universal intercept together with one random error term for each of the three levels (i=individuals, j=post-election contexts, k=countries).[8]

Model 1: $Satdem_{ijk} = \alpha + e_{ijk} + u_{jk} + v_k$

Model 1 is interesting as the relative size of the variances of the error terms hint at the hierarchical causal origins of satisfaction with democracy. Of course, a precondition for pursuing contextual scandal effects is variation at this particular level. The estimates for Model 1 reveal significant variation at all three levels of analysis. Characteristically for survey data, some 67 percent of the overall variation can be attributed to individual-level factors (SD=.800). Still, there are significant and non-trivial levels of variation across countries (18 percent; SD; .210) as well as across election contexts (15 percent; SD=.180). This suggests that a "flat" single-level OLS approach could well give biased coefficients and standard errors (Hox 2002; Steenbergen and Jones 2002).

[TABLE 1:ABOUT HERE]

To test H2a and H2b, Model 2 adds independent variables. One registers whether the recent election is associated with scandals. It takes on the value 0 of no journal mentions a scandal and 1 if both journals do.[9] In accordance with our reasoning in the previous section, another registers cumulatively the number of scandal elections have occurred in this country prior to the election in question.

Omitted variable bias is a concern as these data are non-experimental. Selecting control variables, however, is difficult precisely because there has been little comparative research on scandal effects. Thus, there is little specific theory or evidence about when and where scandals elections occur, and whether such factors are related to the dependent variable. Further, only a few of the many individual-level variables that have been discussed in research on political trust are actually available in the data over a sufficient timespan.[10] Similarly, that we only have 15 countries severely limits the number of country-level variables that can be simultaneously modelled (Hox 2002).

Rather than estimating a "fully" specified model, then, model 2 controls for a smaller number of variables at different levels, all of which are known to affect satisfaction with democracy.[11] In several cases, moreover, it is plausible to assume that these also correlate with the probability of scandal elections. More precisely, we control for age, gender and life satisfaction (individual level); year of election and level of unemployment (election level); and proportional versus (partly) non-proportional electoral system (national level).[12]

Model 2: $\text{Satdem}_{ijk} = \alpha + \beta_1 \text{Scandal election}_{jk}$

$+ \beta_2 \text{Cumulative number of past scandal elections}_{jk}$

$+ \text{Country level controls}_k + \text{Election level controls}_{jk} + \text{Individual level controls}_{ijk}$

$+ e_{ijk} + u_{jk} + v_k$

As evidenced by a statistically significant coefficient, there is a negative main effect of scandal election on satisfaction with democracy taking control variables into account

$(\beta_1=-.16)$. In support of H2a, then, recent scandal elections on balance seem to have eroded political trust. This effect, however, only amounts to about one-fifth of the standard deviation at level 1 (.800). Also, the election context variation only drops from .180 in Model 1 to .173 in Model 2. All this indicates that recent scandal elections have played a certain but modest role in explaining variation in satisfaction with democracy across election contexts. Moreover, there is no sign here that satisfaction with democracy is affected by the accumulated number of past elections.

Model 3 tests the scandal priming hypothesis (H3a) and the rival scandal fatigue hypothesis (H3b). It shows what has happened to the effect of a recent scandal election as the historical baggage of past scandal elections has become heavier over time. The interaction coefficient β_3 now registers whether the impact of a scandal election has decreased, increased, or stayed the same as the accumulated number of past scandal elections has grown.

Model 3: $Satdem_{ijk} = \alpha + \beta_1 Scandal\ election_{jk}$
$+ \beta_2 Cumulative\ number\ of\ scandal\ elections_{jk}$
$+ \beta_3 Scandal\ election_{jk} \times Cumulative\ number\ of\ past\ scandal\ elections_{jk}$
$+ Country\ level\ controls_k + Election\ level\ controls_{jk} + Individual\ level\ controls_{ijk}$
$+ e_{ijk} + u_{jk} + v_k$

The effect (β_1) of a new scandal election has now increased to -.25. As this equals roughly one standard deviation across countries and elections, and about one-third of the standard deviation across individuals, the effect is more substantial than in Model 1. It is crucial to note, however, that this coefficient taps the effect in the early situation before the

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scandalization of elections phenomenon emerged. In more recent situations, the interaction coefficient suggests, the impact of a scandal election will be smaller (β_3=.09). Specifically, the impact of scandal elections is predicted to have withered away completely by the time a country reaches an accumulation of 2-3 scandal elections as reported in both journals.

This latter finding is inconsistent with the scandal priming hypothesis (H3a) predicting that scandals will become more consequential as they become more common. Rather, it is wholly consistent with the scandal-fatigue-hypothesis predicting that citizens react less to the scandal components of elections (H3b). Moreover, the inclusion of an interaction term allows us to discover that also cumulative election history exercises a negative effect, though apparently only when the recent election was not scandalized (B_2= -.09). Scandal history thus appears to matter when there are no major recent events.

Finally, the control variables help putting scandal effects into perspective. A comparison with life dissatisfaction reveals it would take about four recent or eleven past scandal elections to match differences between really happy/unhappy individuals. A comparison with unemployment rate is more flattering for the scandal effect. A recent scandal election is about as destructive for democratic satisfaction as another 10-15 percent of unemployment (assuming no threshold effects). Furthermore, whenever the recent election was not scandalized, one long-gone scandal election is about as bad news as another 5 percent losing their jobs.

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Scandal heterogeneity?

In this section we relax the implicit scandal homogeneity assumption made in previous analyses. According to H4, the generalization from specific events to general mistrust will be smoother when more politicians, especially from different parties, are accused of wrongdoings. To test this, we created dummy variables separating scandal elections involving (1) more than one politician from a scandalized party (*multipolitician scandal election)*, (2) politicians from two or more parties *(multiparty scandal election)*, and (3) scandal elections involving one individual only (*single politician scandal election*). Looking at the entire period, 42 percent of all scandal elections are multipolitician, 22 percent multiparty, and the remaining 36 percent are single politician. Table 2 displays their effects together with interactions with accumulated scandal history.

Model 4 in Table 2 adds an important finding. Apparently only multiparty scandal elections have had significant negative net effects on satisfaction with democracy (-.40). Interestingly, its effects remain the same over time as indicated by the wholly insignificant interaction with accumulated scandal history. Citizens thus appear as sensitive to multiparty scandal elections after the scandalization of elections as before.

TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

In contrast, multipolitician scandal elections have no discernable effect and neither does the interaction with cumulative experience. Single politician scandal elections, too, have insignificant effects looking at the entire period (-.04). Interestingly however, its

interaction with cumulative scandal experience is significantly positive (.22). So whereas single politician scandals, perhaps quite intuitively, did not matter much initially they gradually take on positive effects as scandal experiences pile up.

Overall, these results offer two additions to the story. First, not even major scandal elections that qualify for our overall criteria are created equal with respect to their impact on trust. Only multiparty scandal contexts, which should stimulate generalization, have exercised systematic net negative effects. A second addition concerns the nature of "scandal fatigue," which comes out as both a compositional as well as a contextual process. It is compositional as it turns out that the consistently most influential scandal election type (multiparty) has not become more common; the correlation between time and percentage of multiparty scandal contexts is only very mildly positive (r=.04; n=114). An equally flat line is found for multi politician contexts (r=.04; n=114). In contrast, there has been a clear increase in single politician scandal contexts (r=.23; n=114 elections).

Scandal fatigue, however, also seems to be a more genuinely contextual phenomenon, in the sense that effects of comparable events also change as a result of overall scandalization. Specifically, single-politician scandal elections used to be inconsequential but have assumed positive net effects as scandal elections have become more common. Possible interpretations and implications of this and other findings will be the topics of the concluding section.

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Conclusions

In support of H1, scandal elections as measured here were uncommon in the late 1970s and early 1980s. More recently, close to half of the parliamentary elections in Western Europe are associated with at least one scandal that scholars find worth mentioning in professional election analyses.

Looking across the entire period, furthermore, scandal elections have had negative net effects on political trust. Recent scandal elections have mattered the most, but the number of past scandal elections also play a role in the absence of recent events. These negative net effects support H2a, rather than H2b, and fit with several past studies. Still, scandals variables only explain a small part of the variation in satisfaction with democracy. Moreover, effects are clearly smaller than that of individual level life dissatisfaction, and instead comparable with the more moderate impact of unemployment levels.

Negative net effects, furthermore, seem to have been typical mainly for an earlier historical epoch. Consistent with the "scandal fatigue" hypothesis (H3b), we find an interaction between the impact of a recent scandal election and the accumulated number of past scandal elections in the country. During the early period when major scandal elections were still rare exceptions, scandal elections had more sizable negative ramifications. However, as scandals have accumulated—at different rates in different countries—the net effect has shrunk. It is predicted to have vanished by the time a country reaches an accumulation of 2-3 major scandal elections.

For sure, this does not mean scandal effects will disappear overnight. Major scandal elections continue to matter in the future as they enter the accumulated scandal history that tends to be revived at election time. Thus, while current-day scandal elections may now be less clearly consequential in the negative direction, citizens continue to be negatively affected by events that once were. Ultimately however, also the historical baggage will transform and increasingly consist of events that were not even consequential when they first surfaced.

The test of H4 confirmed that election contexts matter more where several politicians from several parties are scandalized. In fact, the negative net impact over the entire period appears mainly driven by this subset of scandal elections. Single party or single politician contexts do not appear to ever have mattered much in the negative direction. Additionally, the examination of H4 throws light on the nature of the scandal fatigue syndrome. First, the composition of scandal elections has changed in at least one important way: multiparty scandal elections matter negatively throughout the period but have not become more common. Most of the general scandalization instead is due to an increase in single politican scandal elections. Thus, scandalization appears to have spread itself thin across elections. Second, we find larger heterogeneity in the direction of effects as scandal elections become more common. In particular, single-actor scandal elections used to be inconsequential but gradually assume positive effects. To our knowledge this is the first comparative evidence that at least one significant subgroup of scandals can exercise positive effects on political trust.

Borttaget: (

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Providing a fuller explanation for the increasingly heterogeneous and partly positive effects will be a challenge for future research. One possible explanation is that citizens are (increasingly) happy to see the political system sanitize itself from "bad apples." Single-politician scandal elections may matter in the positive direction because they might be more likely to provide that sanitation, whereas multi-actor contexts may increase the odds that at least some perceived villain gets away with it.

However, the uncovered patterns could also be more directly consistent with a refined version of the scandal fatigue story. Under this modified interpretation, citizens are tired of, and desensitized to, scandals. But they may still be persuaded of their relevance if it seems likely that several individuals from several parties are scandalized. By contrast, in the increasingly common single-politician scandal election contexts they may question the media messengers. From this vantage point, then, citizens are increasingly quick recognize that some of the steep increase in scandal coverage is as driven by media logic and journalist ambition as by real-world problems worthy of such massive attention. From this perspective, positive effects of single-politician scandal elections on the (notoriously unclear) satisfaction with democracy indicator might signify sympathy for popular but scandalized politicians and support for a democracy under attack by overaggressive media.

There are some scattered and anecdotal observations to support this latter interpretation. Miller (1999:724) observed in the Clinton-Lewinsky aftermath that "One frequently got the impression that the journalists were all Woodward and Bernstein wannabees, but that

they did not want to put any effort into checking out their sources […] Moreover, news media were constantly filled with stories about the scandal even though the public overwhelmingly reported that the affair was receiving too much coverage." One might add here that there is little systematic evidence to show that the moral standards of West European politicians have actually deteriorated. In a study of state administrative capacity, which is strongly determined by levels of corruption, Bäck and Hadenius (2008) report only a slightly negative curve during the period 1985-2000. Thus, citizens are faced with increasing single-politician scandal coverage at the same time as their societies are largely as (non)corrupt as before. Perhaps citizens are asking themselves whether the scandalization of electoral politics is really warranted. Politicians certainly do. By example, when Swedish MPs were surveyed about the causes of declining trust among citizens "scandals involving politicians" were ranked at the bottom of a list of factors, whereas "media coverage of politics" was ranked as the clearly most important reason (Esaiasson and Holmberg 1996:120-2).

In conclusion, scandals have become the bread-and-butter of electoral politics. But the butter seems to have been spread thin. Perhaps for this reason scandal elections—as a *general* phenomenon—have become largely inconsequential for citizens' satisfaction with representative democracy.

Appendix A. Covered parliamentary elections
in 19 Western Democracies 1977-2007

	77	78	79	80	81	82	83	84	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07
Austria			(Y)				X			X				X				0					(Y)			0				(Y)	
Belgium	-	(0)			0				0		0				X				X				0				X				X
Denmark	-		(0)		0			Y			0	(0)		X				X				0			0						
Finland			(0)				X				0				0				0				0				0				X
France		0			0					Y		Y					X				X					(Y)					Y
Germany				0			0				0			Y				(Y)				(Y)				X			X		
Great Britain			(0)				0				0					X					0				0				X		
Greece	(0)				0				0				X*	(0)			X			(0)				(0)				X			
Iceland		(0)	(0)				(0)				X				0				Y				Y				0				-
Ireland	-				0	Y#					X		0			0					Y					(Y)					X
Italy			-				X				0					X		X		Y					0					0	
Luxembourg			(0)					0					Y					(0)					(0)					-			
Malta					(0)						0					(0)				(0)		(0)					(0)				
Netherlands	-				(0)	0				Y			(0)					0				0				0	0			X	
Norway	(0)				0				0				0				Y				(Y)				Y				0		
Portugal			0	(Y)			0		0		Y				(Y)				X				X			0			X		
Spain	-		-			0				(0)			0				X			X				X				0			
Sweden			(0)			0			0			X			0			0				X				X				X	
Switzerland			(0)				(0)				Y				Y				0				Y				0				0

Legend: 0: No scandal reported for election context; Y: Scandal reported for election context in one journal; X: Scandal reported for election context in two journals.; ( ) Only one election report available.; - : No election report available.; # Ireland held two elections in 1982, the coding Y refers to the November election; * Greece held two elections in 1989, both of them are coded X.
Comment: Electoral Studies does not cover election contexts before 1980 (with the exception of France 1978 and Portugal 1979).

Appendix B: List of Election Scandals 1977-2007

Country	Election context	Description	Journals
Austria	1979	The Androsch affair (financial misconduct)	WEP only
	1983	Scandals related to construction works	WEP/ES
	1986	The Reder Affair (WWII war criminal personally welcomed to Austria by the defence minister)	WEP/ES
		The Androsch affair	WEP/ES
		The Sekanina affair (financial misconduct)	WEP/ES
		The Waldheim controversy	WEP/ES
	1990	Scandals in the SPÖ	WEP/ES
	1994	Corruption in the socialist party	WEP/ES
	1999	The Rosenstingl affair (stealing MP)	WEP only
	2006	The BAWAG scandal (financial misconduct)	ES only
Belgium	1995	The Augusta affair	WEP/ES
	1999	The Augusta affair	WEP/ES
	2003	The Antwerp city administration affair (financial misconduct)	WEP/ES
Denmark	1984	The Mogens Glistrup affair (financial misconduct)	ES
	1994	The Poul Schlüter affair (misconduct)	WEP/ES
	1998	The Hans Engell affair (drunk driving)	WEP/ES
Finland	1983	Malpractice among politicians	WEP/ES
	2007	"Iraqgate" (misuse of secret documents)	WEP/ES
France	1986	The Rainbow Warrior affair	ES
	1988	Luchaire affair	WEP
	1988	The Carrefour du developpement affair (financial misconduct)	WEP
	1993	The Pechiney affair (insider trading)	WEP/ES
	1993	The Urba-Technic affair (campaign finance misconduct)	WEP
		The "contaminated blood" affair (unnecessary delays in HIV-testing)	WEP
	1997	Toubon, Longuet and Thoma scandals	WEP only
	2007	The Alain Juppe affair (financial misconduct)	WEP
Germany (West)	1987	The Flick affair (corruption)	WEP
	1987	The Neue Heimat affair (financial misconduct)	WEP

Appendix 2 (cont.)			
Germany	1994	Corruption scandals in the CSU	WEP only
	2002	The Kohl affair (financial misconduct)	WEP/ES
		Refuse incineration affair (corruption)	WEP
		The Scharping affair (financial misconduct)	WEP
Great Britain	1987	The Westland affair (controversies related to helicopter manufacturer)	WEP/ES
	1997	The Scott investigation (government sales of weapons)	WEP
		The "Cash for questions" affair (corruption)	WEP
		Sex scandals among MP:s	WEP/ES
Greece	1989a	Papandreou scandals	WEP/ES
	1989b	The Koskotas affair (corruption)	WEP/ES
	1993	The Mitsotakis affair (corruption)	WEP/ES
	2004	Corruption	WEP/ES
		The Porto Carras scandal	WEP
Ireland	1982b	Government scandals (including the handling of a murder in the defence minister's apartment)	WEP
	1992	Corrupt dealings between the meat industry and the government	WEP
	1997	The "Mercs and perks" affair (abuse of government cars)	WEP only
	2002	Government scandals	ES
	2007	The Ahern affair (financial misconduct)	WEP/ES
Iceland	1987	The Gudmundson affair (tax freud)	WEP/ES
	1995	Scandal in the Social Democrat party	ES
Italy	1983	The petrol scandal	ES
		Corruption in the PSI	WEP/ES
		The Ambrosiano bank affair and Calvi mystery (the murder or suicide of the chairman of the Ambrosiano bank and loss of a large sum of money)	ES
		The Camorra affair (ties between the mob and political parties)	ES
	1992	Corruption in the socialist party, ties between Christian Democrats and the mob	WEP/ES
	1994	Operation Clean Hands	WEP/ES
	1996	The Cesare Previti affair (bribery)	ES
Luxembourg	1989	The Mondorf affair (financial misconduct)	ES
Netherlands	1986	The RSV of Rotterdam affair (improper government grants)	WEP
	2006	The Ayaan Hirsi Ali affair (lying MP)	WEP/ES

Appendix 2 (cont.)

Norway	1997	Planning minister scandal (financial misconduct)	WEP only
	2001	Deputy leader sex scandal	WEP
		The Bastesen affair (politician had indirect investments in a pornography channel)	WEP
Portugal	1980	The Sá Carneiro affair (financial misconduct)	WEP
	1991	Several scandals (one involving the minister of finance)	ES
	1995	Government scandals (corruption)	WEP/ES
	2005	Government scandals, illegal building permissions	WEP/ES
Spain	1993	The Filesa case (corruption in the PSOE)	WEP/ES
		The Guerra affair (financial misconduct)	WEP
	1996	Government corruption	WEP/ES
		The GAL affair (illegal death squad)	WEP/ES
	2000	The José Borrel Affair (corruption)	WEP/ES
Sweden	1988	The Ebbe Carlsson affair (illegal private investigation of the assassination of Olof Palme)	WEP/ES
	1998	The Mona Sahlin affair (abuse of credit cards)	WEP/ES
	2002	The campaign booth report affair (improper statements by politicians)	WEP/ES
	2006	The spy scandal (campaign espionage)	WEP/ES
Switzerland	1987	Corruption in the People's party	WEP
	1991	The Kopp affair (discovery of secret files)	WEP only
	1999	The Bellasi scandal (financial misconduct and smuggling of arms to criminal organizations by the intelligence service)	WEP

Legend: "WEP/ES": Scandal reported in both journals. "WEP": Scandal reported in West European politics but not in Electoral Studies. "ES": Scandal reported in Electoral studies but not in West Europan politics. "WEP only": Scandal reported in West European Politics, election context not covered by Electoral Studies. "ES only": Scandal reported in Electoral Studies, election context not covered by West European Politics.

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Figure 1. Proportion of parliamentary elections
for which scandals were mentioned in either
West European Politics or Electoral Studies (N=153)
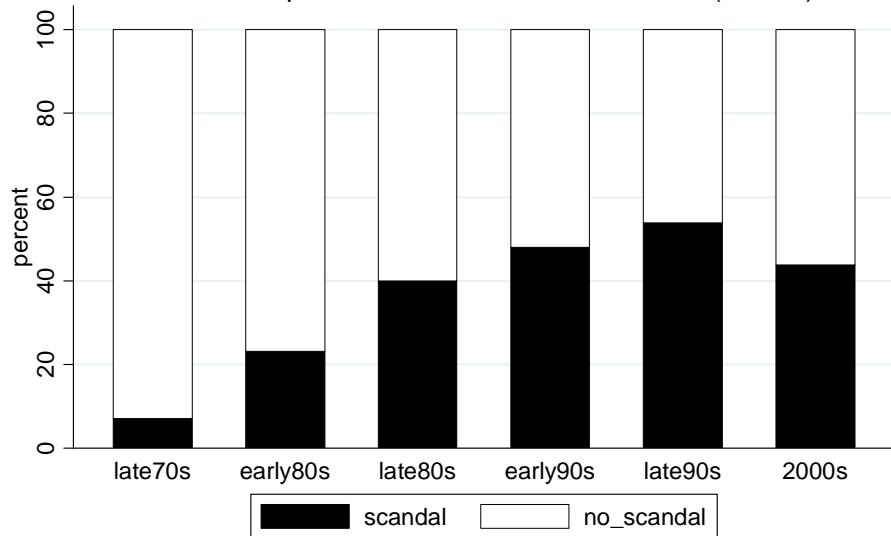
Figure 2. Proportion of parliamentary elections
for which scandals were mentioned in either
West European Politics or Electoral Studies
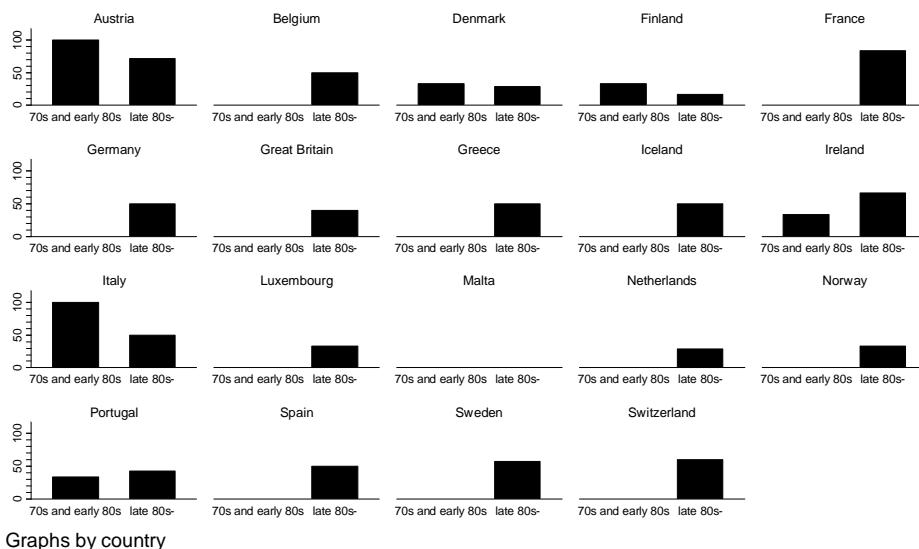
Graphs by country

Borttaget: ---------Sidbrytning---------
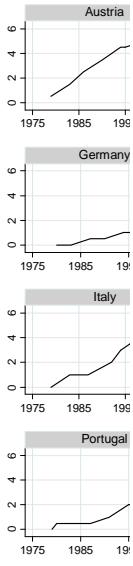
Table 1. Multilevel models of scandal election effects on satisfaction with democracy (three levels; ML estimation)

	Model 1: Variance components model	Model 2: Main effects model	Model 3: Interactive model
FIXED PART:			
Cumulative number of past scandal elections$_{jk}$		-.05	-.09**
Scandal election$_{jk}$ (0=scandal in no journal; 1=scandal in both journals)		-.16***	-.25***
Scandal election$_{jk}$ x Cumulative number of past scandal elections$_{jk}$			.09*
Controls:			
Age$_{ijk}$		.0003*	.0002*
Woman$_{ijk}$		-.03***	-.03***
Life dissatisfaction$_{ijk}$ (1 – 4)		-.32***	-.32***
Unemployment level$_{jk}$		-.02**	-.02**
Year$_{jk}$ (0=1980)		.01*	.01**
Fully proportional electoral system$_k$		.21***	.18**
RANDOM PART:			
Individual level: Standard deviation of e$_{ijk}$	.800***	.791***	.765***
Election level: Standard deviation of u$_{jk}$	.180***	.173***	.138***
Country level: Standard deviation of v$_k$	.210***	.206***	.108***
No. of countries	15	15	15
No. of elections	55	55	55
No. of individuals	59,448	59,448	59,448
-2LogLikelihood	142348.8	137057.0	137053.4

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Notes: Unweighted data from The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File. Parliamentary elections. The models also contain intercepts, the estimates of which are not displayed here.

Table 2. Multilevel models of types of scandal elections and satisfaction with democracy (three levels; ML estimation)

	Model 4: Main effects	Model 5: Interactions
FIXED PART:		
Single-politician scandal election$_{jk}$ (0=scandal in no journal; 1=scandal in both journals)	.06	-.04
Multi-politician scandal election$_{jk}$ (0=scandal in no journal; 1=scandal in both journals)	-.03	.01
Multi-party scandal election$_{jk}$ (0=scandal in no journal; 1=scandal in both journals)	-.36***	-.40***
Cumulative number of past scandal elections$_{jk}$	-.06**	-.07**
Single-politician scandal election$_{jk}$ x Cumulative number of past scandal elections$_{jk}$		.22**
Multi-party scandal election$_{jk}$ x Cumulative number of past scandal elections$_{jk}$		.05
Multi-politician scandal election$_{jk}$ x Cumulative number of past scandal elections$_{jk}$		-.03
RANDOM PART:		
Individual level: Standard deviation of e$_{ijk}$	.765***	.765***
Election level: Standard deviation of u$_{jk}$	.141***	.133***
Country level: Standard deviation of v$_k$	.064***	.053*
No. of countries	15	15
No. of elections	55	55
No. of individuals	59,448	59,448
-2LogLikelihood	137046.7	137039.6

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01
Notes: Unweighted data from The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File. Parliamentary elections. The models also contain intercepts, as well as the same control variables as does Table 1, the estimates of which are not displayed here.

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ENDNOTES

[1] More exactly, the study covers elections with reports published at the latest in 2007. Elections reported later are not included.

[2] These were: "Political Scandals and Causes Celebres since 1945. An International Reference Compendium. (1991)," "Political Scandals and Media Across Democracies Volume I and II" (two special issues of American Behavioral Scientist, see Tumber and Waisbord 2004), and "Scandals in Past and Contemporary Politics" (edited by Garrard and Newell 2006).

[3] The scandal election rate was 34 percent for West European Politics (N=151) and 36 percent for Electoral Studies (N=116).

[5] As indicated in the section on data and measurement, we find equally clear support for H1 also when journals are considered separately, and when the criterion are changed to an election having to be associated with scandals in both journals. For the sake of parsimony, and to extend the test over a longer period of time, we report only Figure 1 (scandal in at least one journal).

[6] Satisfaction with democracy was not included in all Eurobarometer surveys. However, 86 percent of respondents included in Table 1 were surveyed in the Eurobarometer that followed immediately in the subsequent half-year. None were surveyed later than in the fourth post-election Eurobarometer. Analyses show that effects of scandal elections are not weaker among those few respondents that were surveyed later than in the subsequent half-year.

[7] The empirical window provided by Table 1 is smaller than previous analyses both in terms of space and time. As for space, it is necessarily restricted to the 15 EU countries

that have been surveyed with some regularity by the Eurobarometer. As for time, it covers only elections until spring 2001 because satisfaction with democracy is included for the last time in the autumn the same year. Finally, the time period starts in 1981 as the analysis draws on information provided by both journals.

[8] Multilevel modes were estimated using STATA's xtmixed command

[9] Results which are not shown in detail here suggest an overall measure of chronological time would be less than optimal when testing for scandal priming and fatigue. First, and most importantly, countries have gone through different numbers of scandal elections. Some countries – Austria, Greece, Italy, and Sweden – are registered for about 4 or more experiences whereas others Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, and the Netherlands have had very few. Secondly, the timing of scandalization varies considerably. In some countries, it has emerged gradually over the years, whereas other countries have experienced more intense and recent increases (i.e. Belgium).

[10] Three variables emphasized by the political trust literature—general media use, postmaterialist values, macroeconomic perceptions, and general media use—are available but only for certain periods. We decided against using them as their inclusion would severely shorten the time frame, reduce the number of countries, and generally result in a data loss of one-third (postmaterialism), close to half (media use), or more than half (economic evaluations). It should be noted, however, that some of the variation in postmaterialism and economic evaluations is picked up by the joint inclusion of age, year, and unemployment controls. Moreover, we decided against controlling for political orientations that are conceptually close to satisfaction with democracy such as the strength of party attachment. Such orientations may constitute legitimate causal parths for

scandal election effects. While such mechanisms are interesting in themselves this paper is mainly concerned with the extent of, and explanations for, "total" scandal election effects.

[11] Year is needed to discover that also cumulative election history seems to matter. Its negative coefficient is initially masked by a positive time trend in the data. The trend is partly due to the fact that high-satisfaction countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Austria became EU (barometer) members at a later stage and that low-satisfaction countries such as Italy and Belgium were already in the data to begin with. While this "trend" is not very substantively interesting one needs to control for it in order to discover the moderately negative effect of number of past scandal elections.

[12] We have also performed additional tests additional performance indicators (election level) such as GDP growth. However, this is not shown in the table as growth is insignificant controlling for unemployment and life satisfaction. The macro data used for Model 4 were taken from the Quality of Government Institute's Social Policy Data Set (Samanni, Teorell, Kumlin, and Rothstein 2008). In turn, this data set draws annual unemployment levels from OECD data as taken from the "Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2006" (Armingeon, Gerber, Leimgruber, and Beyeler 2008), and growth levels from Eurostat (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat) and "Penn World Table" (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2002). For electoral systems, we used information from Golder (2005).

Borttaget: ¶
The two first control variables are age and gender. Throughout the period, older respondents are at any given point in time more likely to be satisfied, perhaps out of more respect for authorities and less self-expressive participatory individualism (Inglehart 1999). Likewise, women tend to be less satisfied with democracy, reasonably because of their chronic subordination in society and politics.¶
¶
Furthermore, the model controls for life dissatisfaction, where personal unhappiness is strongly associated with less democratic satisfaction (-.32). This is an important control variable because scandals may be more frequently covered, dwelled-upon, and exaggerated where there is much general dissatisfaction. Poor political performance may give highly negative, mocking or disrespectful information about politicians a boost as popular campaign themes. If so, the bivariate scandal effect may be a compositional mirage due to the fact that scandals rise to prominence where there are many dissatisfied individuals. A similar rationale underpins the contextual unemployment level control; perhaps scandals figure as major political themes more often where the polit

that an overall measure of chronological time would be less than optimal when testing for scandal priming and fatigue. First, and most importantly, countries have gone through different numbers of scandal elections. Some countries – Austria, Greece, Italy, and Sweden – are registered for about 4 or more experiences whereas others Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, and the Netherlands have had very few. Secondly, the timing of scandalization varies considerably. In some countries, it has emerged gradually over the years, whereas other countries have experienced more intense and recent increases. Thus, in conclusion, the scandalization of elections is best described as a common theme with variations.

As these data are non-experimental one naturally wonders if results change when control variables are added. Selecting control variables, however, is difficult precisely because there has been little comparative research on political scandals. Thus, there is little specific theory or evidence to draw on when thinking about the contextual circumstances under which scandals are more or less likely to attract attention, and whether any such factors are also related to the dependent variable. Further, only a few of the many individual-level variables that have been discussed in research on political trust are actually available in the data over a sufficient timespan.

[1] Similarly, that we only have 15 countries severely limits the number of country-level variables that can be simultaneously

modelled (Hox 2002).

Rather than estimating a "fully" specified model, then, model 4 controlss for a smaller number of chosen variables at different levels, all of which affect satisfaction with democracy. In several cases, moreover, it is plausible to assume that these also correlate with the probability of scandal electionMore preciselys. versusInterestingly, while the control variables themselves affect satisfaction with democracy, their inclusion marginally strengthens the evidence for scandal election effects. While the cross-level interaction remains the same the recent scandal election coefficient is slightly boosted. The coefficient for the cumulative number of past scandal elections grows to statistical significance.

The two first control variables are age and gender. Throughout the period, older respondents are at any given point in time more likely to be satisfied, perhaps out of more respect for authorities and less self-expressive participatory individualism (Inglehart 1999). Likewise, women tend to be less satisfied with democracy, reasonably because of their chronic subordination in society and politics.

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rationale underpins the contextual unemployment level control; perhaps scandals figure as major political themes more often where

the politr

While both variables affect the dependent variable it is satisfying that the scandal election effects remain also controlling for

individual-level life satisfaction and contextual-level unemployment levels.

Model 4 also controls for the year in which elections were held. This is an important control for several reasons. First, the fact that

bivariate results survive this control means they were not simply due to a spurious relationship with variables strongly related to time.

Moreover, this control allows us to discover that also cumulative election history seems to matter. This negative coefficient has now

grown to statistical significance because it was initially masked by a positive time trend in the data (.01). The trend is partly due to the

fact that high-satisfaction countries such as Sweden, Finland, and Austria became EU (barometer) members at a late stage and that

low-satisfaction countries such as Italy and Belgium were already in the data to begin with. While this "trend" is not very

substantively interesting one needs to control for it in order to discover the moderately negative effect of number of past scandal

elections (-.09)

The last control variable concerns electoral systems and country size. It takes on the value 1 for France, Germany, the UK, and Italy.

The results show that satisfaction with democracy has been somewhat lower in these countries throughout the period. The real reason

for including the control, however, is that these countries had non-proportional (mixed or majoritarian) electoral systems for at least

parts of the period. Perhaps incidentally, these are also the four largest and only G8 countries in the sample. Both electoral systems

and size are relevant here as voters tend to be more susceptible to personal qualities of politicians in non-proportional systems and in

large countries affecting world politics (Curtice and Holmberg 2005; Holmberg and Oscarsson forthcoming). In such settings, a

person- or even scandal-oriented culture—such as that often noted in France or Italy—may develop more easily. Interestingly, while

these overlapping factors could well have confounded bivariate estimates Model 4 suggests they did not.

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a one broad category, with no consideration of the variation within it. In this section, however, we examine differences between recent

scandal elections with respect to trends and effects. This undertaking is interesting in itself, but also

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two different versions of the scandal fatigue phenomenon. One is that scandal fatigue is driven by changes in the

composition of scandal elections. From this vantage point, a greater proportion of scandals today are of a character that does not (and never did) stimulate generalisations about politics. The second version of scandal fatigue is more *genuinely contextual* in that that a general scandalization of political communication has desensitized citizens to the extent that even scandal elections that once provoked generalisations have now lost their causal force.

We then looked at further differences among "unequivocal" scandal elections. For a second group of analyses, we counted scandal election traits that should theoretically

 smoothen the process of generalization and thus produce stronger effects. Theoretically, one would expect the generalization from specific events to general mistrust to become smoother where more politicians, perhaps from different parties, are accused of wrongdoings. For this purpose we have created two dummy variables that capture scandals that involve (1) more than one politician from a scandalized party (*mult ipolitician party scandal)*, and (2) politicians from two or more parties *(multiparty scandal)*. For the sake of comparison, a third dummy variable captures the residual category of more "ordinary" types of scandal elections involving alleged wrongdoings of individual politicians (*individual politician scandal*). To pick up nuances of the scandal fatigue phenomenon, we allow all three variables to interact with our measure of accumulated scandal experiences in respective country. According to our

coding, 42 percent of all election scandals are classified as multipolitician, 22 percent as multiparty, and the remaining 36 percent as individual politician.

Teckensnitt:Kursiv

An election-level variable was coded 0 for scandal-free elections, 1 for ordinary scandal elections, and then adding a point for (a) scandal elections concerning more than one politician from a scandalized party, (b) old scandals that apparently are explosive enough to resurface during campaigns, (c) scandal elections concerning more than one party, and (d) scandal elections that involve alleged corruption, assuming that corruption is (perceived as) especially destructive for a whole range of democratic and societal outcomes, including cooperation, social and political trust, and economic growth (Holmberg, Rothstein, and Nasiritousi 2009).

[3] The resulting variable varies between 0 (scandal-free election) and 4 (reemerging, multi-politician/multi-party, corruption scandal elections). We then estimated an alternative version of Models 2 and 4 in Table 1, where scandal election variables registered this more fine-tuned variation. The results suggest that explanatory nuance is gained in that the difference between scandal-free election and very severe recent scandal election is -.20 (p=.000), as compared to the previously reported -.13 effect of any scandal election. In a further step, the scandal portion of the variable (1-4) was split as close to the median as possible, resulting in two dummies resulting tapping "less severe" and "more severe" scandal elections. The more severe half is significantly consequential for trust looking over

the entire period (-.29; p=.000), whereas the impact of less severe scandal elections is close to zero. Interestingly, an interactive model suggests the initial impact of the former (-.39; p=.000) vanishes completely after roughly four unequivocal scandal elections (.11; p=.052).

A third and final group of analyses looked closer at the number of politicians and actors simultaneously scandalized in one election context. Theoretically, one would expect the generalization from specific events to general mistrust to become smoother where more politicians, perhaps from different parties, are accused of wrongdoings.

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 Justifying our approach

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, results reported in Table 2 show that three categories of election scandals affect political trust differently. In accordance with

expectation, e

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lections with more than one scandalized party ("m

Teckensnitt:Kursiv

Three groups of analyses were performed. The first one exploits the fact that there are two expert sources. This provides an opportunity to compare scandal elections that are "unequivocal"—in the sense that both experts discuss scandals—with scandal elections that are less clear-cut and more uncertain in that only one expert does. To this end, alternative versions of the models in Table 1 were estimated (not shown in table). These included a dummy variable for "one-journal" scandal elections and another dummy for "two-journal" scandal elections. The results reveal that only two-journal scandal elections have significant effects looking at the entire period, but also that their impact has decreased. For instance, a model including main effects of both dummies, and their interactions with past scandal history, reveals estimates for the two-journal dummy that are very similar to those of Table 1. In contrast, the main effect of the one-journal dummy, as well as its interaction with previous scandal history, is virtually zero.

At this preliminary stage we have identified two subsets of scandals that might

This expectation is borne out in that e

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Turning finally to election scandals involving single politicians

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Elections in which several politicians from the same party are scandalized have only a non-significant negative effect (-.06; p=.288), whereas there is no effect whatsoever of one-party-single-politician scandal elections. Moreover, these differences remain intact, with wholly insignificant interactions with accumulating scandalization over time. Citizens appear as sensitive to multiparty scandal elections at the end of the period as they were from the outset.

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However, a closer inspection of election-level data indicates that multiparty scandal elections is the only measured aspect that is uncorrelated with time (r=.03; n=115 elections). In contrast, one-party-single-politician scandal elections is the aspect that is most strongly correlated with time (r=.23).

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are more equivocal, and

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possess "severity" traits allowing

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the scandalization of election

for political trust (mainly individual politician scandals). In contrast, the frequency of severe scandal elections which have

consistently affected trust has remained stable over time. When conceptualized as a general phenomenon, recent political scandals

thus appear to gradually become less consequential.

To substantiate this understanding of the process we have estimated how each type of election scandal correlates with time. In

accordance with expectations, the correlation for individual politician scandal elections is quite strong ($r=.23$, $p < .01$??, $n=115$

elections), whereas multiparty scandal election is uncorrelated with time ($r=.03$; $p < .XXX$).

The contextual process leading to scandal fatigue is more complex. As scandals accumulate in a particular country, citizens begin to

adjust their evaluation of scandals that involve alleged wrongdoings of individual politicians. While these scandals were originally

inconsequential for trust in democracy – perhaps because the accused politician or his/her party suffered defeat at the ballot box –

citizens gradually find that they might actually speak in favour of the functioning of democracy. The precise reason why is unclear at

this stage, but this finding is consistent with a process in which citizens acknowledge that journalists take an active role in the

construction of a scandalous political context, and that there might be a reason to side with politicians in this apparent struggle for

control of public deliberation.

On the one hand, we find support for the idea that types of scandal elections that used to be influential at lower levels of accumulated scandalization now no longer matter much. This is true for both more "unequivocal" as well as for more "severe" scandal elections. On the other hand, we find that multiparty scandal elections have greater negative trust effects than other scandal elections, but are influential at all levels of accumulated scandalization. These elections, however, have not become more important over time. Scandal fatigue, then, is probably best understood both as process in which citizens are desensitized to old scandal material, but also gradually exposed a new mix of such material that is found to be less informative concerning the functioning of democracy.

Figure 3. Cumulative number of scandal elections
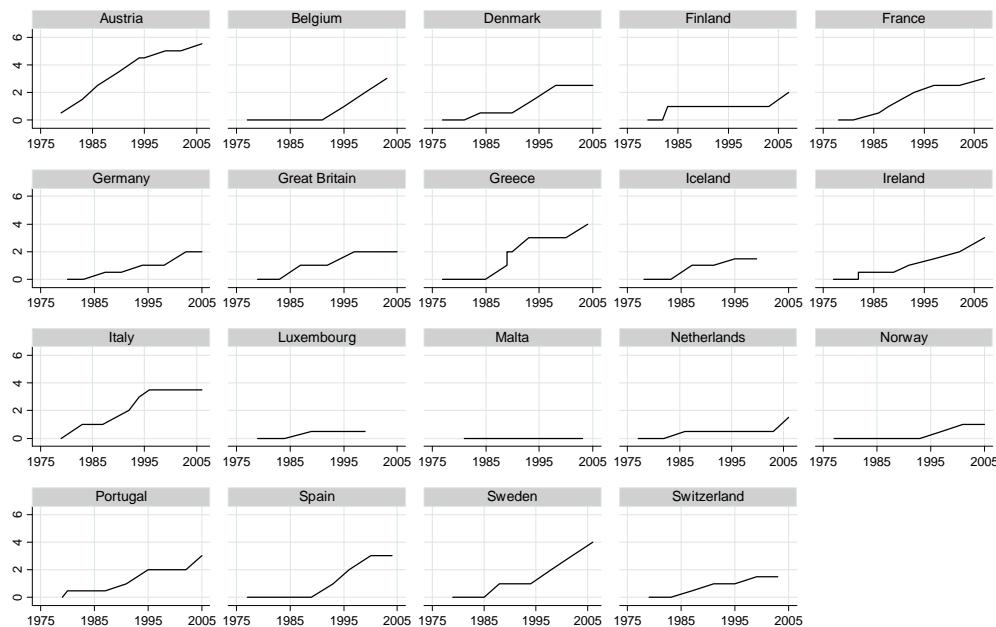
Notes: Parliamentary elections. See main text for more information.

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G8 power with non-		
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Sid. 42: [36] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 11:01:00 AM
63		

Sid. 42: [36] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 10:47:00 AM
63		

Sid. 42: [37] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 11:01:00 AM
68,620		

Sid. 42: [37] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 10:47:00 AM
68,620		

Sid. 42: [38] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 11:01:00 AM
162868.1		

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162,863.2		

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Table 2. Multilevel models of effects of different types of scandal elections on satisfaction with democracy (three levels; ML estimation)

	Model 1:	*Model 2:*	*Model 3:*
Scandal election in one journal			
Scandal election in two journals			
Scandal severity index (0-5)			
Recent more severe scandal election$_{jk}$ (0=scandal in no journal; 1=scandal in both journals)			
Recent less severe scandal election$_{jk}$ (0=scandal in no journal; 1=scandal in both journals)			
RANDOM PART:			
Individual level: Standard deviation of e_{ijk}			
Election level: Standard deviation of u_{jk}			
Country level: Standard deviation of v_k			
No. of countries			
No. of elections			
No. of individuals			
-2LogLikelihood			

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15		

Sid. 43: [40] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 10:47:00 AM
15		

Sid. 43: [41] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 11:01:00 AM
	63	
Sid. 43: [41] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 10:47:00 AM
	63	
Sid. 43: [42] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 11:01:00 AM
	68,620	
Sid. 43: [42] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 10:47:00 AM
	68,620	
Sid. 43: [43] Borttaget	stakum	5/5/2009 10:37:00 AM

*p<.10 ** p<.05 *** p<.01

Notes: Unweighted ata from The Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File. Parliamentary elections. All models contain intercepts and the same control variables as in Table 1, model 4, the estimates of which are not displayed.

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[1] Particularly tTwo variables emphasized by the political trust literature—postmaterialist values and macroeconomic perceptions—are available but only for certain periods. We decided against using them as their inclusion would severely shorten the time frame, reduce the number of countries, and generally result in a data loss of one-third (postmaterialism) or more than half (economic evaluations). It should be noted, however, that some of their variation is picked up by the joint inclusion of age, year, and unemployment controls. Moreover, we decided against controlling for political orientations that are closely relatedconceptually close to to satisfaction with democracy such as the strength of party attachment. Such orientations may constitute legitimate causal mechanisms for scandal election effects. While such mechanisms are interesting in themselves this paper is mainly concerned with the extent of, and explanations for, "total" scandal election effects.

[2] The macro data used for Model 4 were taken from the Quality of Government Institute's Social Policy Data Set (Samanni, Teorell, Kumlin, and Rothstein 2008). In turn, this data set draws annual unemployment levels from OECD data as taken from the "Comparative Political Data Set 1960-2006" (Armingeon, Gerber, Leimgruber, and

Beyeler 2008), and growth levels from Eurostat (http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat) and "Penn

World Table" (Heston, Summers, and Aten 2002). For electoral systems, we used

information from Golder (2005).

[3] Multiparty scandal elections necessarily concern several individual politicians but such

elections still only get one extra point along the index