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# Presidential scandals and party loyalty

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Thesis

**PRESIDENTIAL SCANDALS AND PARTY LOYALTY**

by

**ALEXANDER BRUCE HENSHAW-GREENE**

B.A., Boston University, 2019

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

2019

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## **PRESIDENTIAL SCANDALS AND PARTY LOYALTY**

**ALEXANDER HENSHAW-GREENE**

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper takes advantage of the unique aspects of Trump's Presidency to design and implement a survey-experiment testing various categories of scandals. Although the findings are limited to the current Presidency, the paper contributes to the literature through its categorization of Trump's scandals, and its application of those categories in an experimental design. The results indicate no significance for any type of scandal; raising questions regarding polarization in the country, and media outlets' extensive coverage of such scandals. Negative partisanship is also examined here as a potential explanation for the high levels of party loyalty seen in the Republican Party – although the results in that area are similarly insignificant. Further research should be done to draw out precise movements among true independents and understand how positive and negative partisanship interact with one another in generating party loyalty.

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## **Introduction:**

Candidate Donald Trump famously said that he could “stand in the middle of 5<sup>th</sup> avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn’t lose voters” (Blake, 2018). This claim reflects a broadly accepted reality of contemporary American politics; that no scandal or revelation can sway the President’s supporters from him. Clearly, having a President with the ability to commit any crime and escape electoral consequences represents a significant concern to American democracy. It therefore bears examining further whether this theory is accurate, and in what circumstances.

For the millions of Americans who turn to cable news to access their information and formulate their opinions on Donald Trump, what they observe has become increasingly absurd. Unsurprisingly, the emergence of a former reality television star to the national political stage brought a new level of dramatic tension and sensationalism to daily political coverage. From blatantly mocking disabled persons to exposures of likely tax fraud, the sheer number of scandals that Trump has invited as a candidate and as President is nearly comical in its breadth and extravagance (Spayd, 2017; Barstow, Craig and Buettner, 2018).

During the 2016 campaign, Trump frequently encouraged violence at his rallies and made dozens of misogynistic and racist statements (Keneally, 2018; Hayes, 2018; Hayes, 2018). Furthermore, it has since become clear that he lies frequently about all manner of things, that he paid women to keep silent about alleged affairs, and that his



business was more of an amateur criminal cabal than legitimate global enterprise (Kessler, Rizzo and Kelly, 2018; Rucker and Wagner, 2018; Davidson, 2018). The severity of these scandals, and public approval's inelasticity following their revelation, perhaps explain why President Trump feels he could commit murder without losing supporters.

It cannot be said that news organizations have been conservative in their coverage of these scandals. Media organization – cable news channels especially – have focused obsessively on the scandalous and sensationalist aspects of the Trump Presidency and of American politics at large. A study by Duncan J. Watts and David M. Rothschild at the Columbia Journalism Review found that over a third of campaign related articles published by the New York Times during the last 69 days of the election could be classified as Personal/Scandal<sup>1</sup> (Watts and Rothschild, 2017). From that same dataset, the researcher determined that only a little over a third could be classified as Policy-focused stories. A separate study from the Shorenstein Center similarly found an extensive focus of scandal over policy (Patterson, 2016). This is not meant necessarily as a criticism of this sort of coverage. Many of the publicized scandals were revealing of the character of both the President, and the people that he employs. Coverage of scandals also often revealed valuable information regarding national security and other news that was undoubtedly relevant to the public. The extent of this coverage, however, is noteworthy

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<sup>1</sup> They define Personal/Scandal coverage as that which focused on the “controversial actions and/or statements of the candidates either during the election itself or prior to it, as well as on the fallout generated by those controversies.”

in its seeming inability to substantially impact voters' positions on the President – no matter the content.

Throughout this unyielding flow of theoretically damaging information about his character and personal history, the polling and data news site FiveThirtyEight consistently judges President Trump's approval to hover around 40% of the electorate (fivethirtyeight.com). It is this general inflexibility in the face of such theatrical revelations that represents an intriguing phenomenon. Given not only the sheer number of scandals, but their relevancy to the well-being of the country, can it be determined which types are most likely to resonate with and potentially sway voters? This is a question that the Democratic Party has been openly struggling with.

Since winning a majority in the House of Representatives in the 2018 midterm elections, the Democrats have been considering how forcefully to investigate the President and his administration. John Cassidy, writing in the *New Yorker*, makes clear that whatever the nuances of their strategy, House Democrats will be focusing heavily on investigations (Cassidy, 2019). This is understandable, as it would be irresponsible for the opposition party to not thoroughly investigate any corruption or illegality that they observe. However, reporting indicates that there has been significant discussion within the party regarding the best path to pursue (Fandos, 2019). Some argue in favor of proceeding aggressively with impeachment, while it appears the party leadership prefers instead to proceed cautiously and methodologically; building a case over time to definitively show the necessity of impeachment. Nancy Pelosi, the Democratic Leader in

the House, argued that impeachment was “not worth it”, unless it was based on overwhelming evidence and had bipartisan support (Fandos, 2019).

The important question for Democrats then, and an important question for political science, is which areas of scandal are most likely to result in partisans changing their position and moving towards a bipartisan consensus regarding the President and his fitness for office. While political science has much to say in some areas of presidential scandals, it offers little in the area of categorizing scandals, and less in the area of gauging how different types of scandals resonate with voters.

Additionally, very little in American political history or political science indicated that a candidate so scandal-plagued and disparaged could win the Presidency. The party loyalty demonstrated by both Republicans and Democrats in the 2016 election clashes with the overwhelmingly negative coverage and perception of the candidates in a fashion that cannot be explained by traditional conceptions of partisanship.

The concept of negative partisanship (NPID) reconciles these two ideas. It explains how voters can be so devoted to a candidate so openly flawed (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016). NPID is the phenomenon by which voters’ devotion to a certain political party comes from a fear or antipathy of the opposing party or parties. Increasingly in American politics, voters care little for their own parties or candidates, but demonstrate extreme loyalty to them out of fear of the other party coming to power. Positive partisanship (PPID), the flip-side of NPID, drives voters to support political figures of

their party out of affection for that party. PPID and NPID affect all voters and interact with one another in complex ways.

This paper intends to take advantage of the unique aspects of Trump's Presidency to design and implement a survey-experiment testing various categories of scandal that will potentially be further examined by the House of Representatives. Analysis of the survey results finds no evidence that Presidential Scandals have any effect on changing voters' feeling towards the President or his impeachment. Although the findings are limited to the current Presidency, this paper contributes to the literature through its categorization of Trump's scandals, and its application of those categories in an experimental design. The finding of no significance for any type of scandal raises further questions regarding polarization in the country, and media outlets' extensive coverage of such scandals. Bipartisan consensus and persuasion, it seems, cannot be achieved through dissemination of any presidential scandals falling under the four categories examined here.

Also examined here is the role of NPID in driving party loyalty. The theory put forward in this paper would imply that those Republican respondents most fearful of the opposing party will be moved towards greater party loyalty following treatment; whereas, strong positive partisans will be either unmoved by such treatment, or moved against the President. However, no significant effect is observed for either PPID or NPID – although there was some minor, insignificant movement that does support the theory that party loyalty is driven primarily by NPID.

The following section provides the theoretical background on presidential scandals and on NPID. The research methods section discusses how the survey was conducted and the data collected. The data section provides the results and analysis of the survey while the final section concludes this paper and discusses further areas of potential research.

### **Theory on Presidential Scandals:**

Scandals dominate the public's view of politics. American media outlets often appears to exist solely for the purpose of breathlessly scrutinizing some ethical lapse by a public figure; whether that lapse be a negligible mistake or criminal conduct. The advent of the 24 hour cable news channels has only heightened this sensationalist behavior in the political media realm. Even serious media outlets and journalists, however, have bought into scandal-mania, although for more noble reasons. Suzanne Garment discusses in her book on political scandals how in the post-Watergate years journalists dedicated themselves to exposing corruption in the political system (Garment, 1991). Garment stresses that the greater appearance of corruption and malfeasance in the public eye in the last several decades has not been due to an inherently more corrupt politics, but rather to a newly developed zeal amongst journalists in unmasking the corruption that already existed. This is not to say that scandals did not exist in politics prior to Watergate; merely that in the ensuing decades all ends of American political journalism and media coverage has been especially focused on routing out unethical, illegal, and immoral behavior.

Political science has also contributed to our understanding of presidential scandals. Research has determined that scandals appear largely to only damage an administration in periods when the economy is poor (Smyth and Taylor 2003; Carlin, Love, and Gallardo, 2014) – implying that the scandals that Trump has endured have little effect on his approval ratings because of the relative health of the economy. Countless books and articles have delved into the details of scandals such as Watergate, Iran-Contra, and Whitewater. Unfortunately, this focus on a limited set of high-profile scandals that to a large degree define specific administrations has resulted in an overly broad definition of presidential scandals. Within the literature, all scandals are treated as essentially the same, with little effort to provide a clear definition. This makes it difficult for the field to fully comprehend the consequences of a media system increasingly sustained by hyper-sensationalized scandals of varying significance. It further makes it difficult to understand the Trump candidacy and presidency, which have been uniquely susceptible to scandals.

Political scientists Scott Basinger and Brandon Rottinghaus note in their 2012 article on scandals that there “exists no widely accepted definition of “scandal” and no database of events fitting such a definition” (Basinger and Rottinghaus, 2012). The two do considerable work to rectify that failing –articulating what constitutes a presidential scandal and how such scandals interact with other political institutions. The definition they use in their work – that this paper will also rely on – is as “allegations of illegal, unethical, or immoral behavior by the president, a senior administration official, or a nominee that comes to light during the president’s term in office and that occurred before

or while the individual occupied office” (Brandon and Rottinghaus 2012). Where I believe their work can be expanded is in the area of voter perceptions of presidential scandals. Specifically, whether and how voters differentiate between different types of scandals.

For the purposes of this paper I draw on the typology of presidential scandals outlined by Basinger and Rottinghaus. The two have put forward a few iterations of their typology, but the one that appears in their 2012 work appears to be the most detailed and comprehensive. They discuss four types of presidential scandals: financial corruption, political corruption, personal scandals, and international scandals. Financial corruption relates to personally profiting off of financial impropriety, tax evasion or accepting bribes. Political corruption relates to abuse of office without profiting financially or the violation of campaign laws and separation of powers. Personal scandals relate to unethical personal behavior such as adultery, harassment, or drug abuse. International scandals relate to the violation of laws involving another nation.

A version of this categorization was used to determine that voters generally do not distinguish between sex scandals and financial scandals as they do not view politician’s personal and professional lives as distinct (Basinger 2013), however, little else has been done attempting to determine voter impressions of the various types, and I found no example where this typology was applied to voters in a survey or experimental format.

It is understandable that no study would attach various scandals to this typology and then apply it to voters, as previous administrations have suffered from far fewer

scandals – as stated earlier, generally only one or two that come to define the administration – limiting any ability to hold variables constant and study the effects of different types of scandals. The Trump Presidency is unique in that it provides multiple examples of each of the four types of scandals. Therefore each type can be applied and put to voters in a survey; providing an opportunity to build a more nuanced understanding of how voters react to scandals.

Both the journalistic and political science focus on presidential scandals has yielded considerable benefits to the general knowledge. However, one area where it can be expanded upon is in classifying contemporary presidential scandals into a typology and assessing the relative resonance of each type with voters. The paper offers no hypothesis as to which of the four treatments will most resonate with voters; instead, the goal is merely to discover if such an inclination even exists and to provide a first attempt at matching existing scandals onto a theoretical categorization.

### **Theory on Negative Partisanship:**

On the topic of negative partisanship, there is considerable evidence that Americans increasingly view members of the opposing political party as a disliked out group (Iyengar et. al, 2012). Some scholars now consider this antipathy towards political opponents as the driving force behind government dysfunction and gridlock (Abramowitz and Webster, 2018). Abramowitz theorizes that this division is reflective of the changing demographic composition of the two parties. As political identities have become increasingly aligned with other social, racial, religious, and cultural identities, Americans



have come to view members of opposing parties as deeply different to them (Ambramowitz, 2013). Over the same period of time, those feelings of hostility have been amplified by a fractured and partisan media (Mutz, 2006; Mutz, 2007; Prior, 2007; Iyengar and Hahn, 2009; Levendusky, 2013).

Negative partisanship offers an explanation as to how it can simultaneously be true that Americans tend to view political parties quite negatively, and demonstrate unprecedented levels of party loyalty (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016). Proponents of negative partisanship argue this is a result of voters being driven above all by fear of the opposing party gaining office. The modern political age is better characterized by voters' distaste towards the opposing party than by any affection towards their own. This paper aims to provide further evidence to support that theory; predicting that survey respondents who register greater antipathy towards the opposing political party will be the least flexible. Respondents who demonstrate greater NPID will likely respond to treatment by rallying around their party leader. Respondents who demonstrate higher PPID, on the other hand, should be unmoved by treatment or moved against the President.

### **Research Methodology:**

The survey used in this paper was designed on Qualtrics and distributed to 2,000 individuals via Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). MTurk is a popular tool used to recruit subjects for surveys and other such tasks. While the potential respondent pool only includes individuals who actively choose to use this site, research suggests that MTurk is

an acceptable tool for recruiting individuals as part of studies on political ideology (Clifford et. al. 2015; Berinsky et al 2012; Coppock 2018). Individuals must be 18 years of age to use the program, therefore the 2,000 respondents of this survey will be treated as representative of the American voting public.

The survey itself consisted of a series of demographic questions, followed by several questions gauging both positive and negative partisanship, followed by a control and four treatment groups, and, finally, three outcome questions. The demographic questions gathered information regarding age, education, income, gender, and Hispanic heritage. To measure partisanship, respondents were first asked whether they think of themselves as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent. If they answered Democrat or Republican, they were then asked how strongly they associate with their Party. The following two questions then asked if they would ever consider voting for a candidate of the opposing Party, and how they feel about that Party. Respondents who declared as Independents were further prompted to answer which Party they think of themselves as closest to – while still given the opportunity to select Independent. Those who answered that they felt closer to either the Democratic or Republican Party were then asked the same two questions about the opposing Party.

The treatments consisted of four news excerpts - three of which were taken from *The New York Times*, and one from *ProPublica*. A control article consisted of a story unrelated to American politics.<sup>2</sup> Each article was roughly 130 words and all were chosen

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<sup>2</sup> The control story came from the *New York Times*, and discussed elevator operators in Rio de Janeiro.

to match the typology of Presidential scandals created by Basinger and Rottinghaus; personal scandal, financial corruption, political corruption and international scandal. Respondents were randomly assigned to either the control group, or one of the four treatments.<sup>3</sup> The excerpts can be found in their entirety in Appendix 1.

Treatment 1 connects to ‘personal scandal’ and consists of an article describing court filings of an individual claiming that Mr. Trump kissed and groped her without her consent. It mentioned that several other woman have made similar claims against him. This article comes from the *New York Times* and was included as it met the definition of immoral personal behavior.

Treatment 2 connects to ‘international scandal’ and consists of an excerpt from a *New York Times* article discussing how President Trump ignored his own intelligence services to support Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s claim that he had no involvement in the death of *Washington Post* journalist Jammal Kashoggi. This was used as it reflected poorly on the President, was widely believed to be a ‘scandal’, and met the definition of involving the affairs of another Nation.

Treatment 3 connects to ‘political corruption’ and consists of an excerpt from a *New York Times* article describing how the President’s personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, broke campaign finance laws at the direction of Mr. Trump. The article makes clear that the President himself is implicated in committing a crime in the course of winning the

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<sup>3</sup> Inexplicably, Qualtrics assigned fewer respondents to the control group and to Treatment 1 than to the other treatment groups. However, there is no significant difference of pre-treatment covariates, indicating that treatment remained random.

Presidency. This article was used as it met the definition of injecting politics into non-political decision and violating campaign laws.

Treatment 4 connects to ‘financial corruption’ and consists of an excerpt from a ProPublica article describing how President Trump profits while in office from domestic government agencies, foreign governments and political groups spending money at locations owned by his family. This article was used as it met the definition of personally profiting from actions taken in office.

Stories related to Russian collusion or Robert Mueller’s investigation were excluded from the survey, as I felt that issue could not be fairly compared to other scandals that have plagued the administration; also, it was unclear where it would fall in the typology.

Respondents were asked two simple comprehension questions following the treatment to gauge attention. Finally, all respondents were asked three questions regarding President Trump. Firstly, they were asked to rate their enthusiasm on a feeling thermometer. Secondly, they were asked whether they approved or disapproved of him being impeached. Thirdly, they were asked if they approved or disapproved of him.

**Results:**

Table 1: Balance tests for pretreatment covariates

	Personal Scandal	International Scandal	Political Corruption	Financial Corruption
Age	-0.0000598 (0.000245)	0.000959** (0.000481)	-0.000156 (0.000483)	-0.000514 (0.000482)
Ideology	-0.00178 (0.00314)	0.0101 (0.00615)	-0.00430 (0.00618)	-0.00281 (0.00616)
Party Id	-0.00614 (0.00720)	-0.00326 (0.0141)	0.0141 (0.0142)	-0.00252 (0.0141)
Gender	-0.0103 (0.0104)	-0.00450 (0.0204)	0.0160 (0.0205)	-0.00399 (0.0204)
Income	0.00583* (0.00336)	-0.00899 (0.00659)	-0.00325 (0.00662)	0.00419 (0.00660)
Education	0.00626 (0.00448)	-0.0145* (0.00877)	0.00936 (0.00882)	-0.00481 (0.00880)
Spanish/Latino	0.0177 (0.0141)	-0.0546** (0.0276)	0.00325 (0.0277)	0.0311 (0.0277)
Constant	0.0124 (0.0404)	0.433*** (0.0792)	0.230*** (0.0796)	0.284*** (0.0795)
Observations	2024	2024	2024	2024

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 1 shows the results of regressing treatment indicators on pretreatment covariates. Given only two results illustrate significance at a confidence level of 95% - indicating very few of the covariates are significant predictors of the treatments - successful randomization is assumed.

*Main Effects*

Table 2: Treatment effects on approval of President Trump

	Approval	Approval	Approval
Personal Scandal	0.0331 (0.0535)		
International Scandal	0.0411 (0.0415)		
Political Corruption	0.0335 (0.0414)		
Financial Corruption	0.0450 (0.0414)		
Pooled Treatment		0.0394 (0.0391)	
Pooled Treatment			0.0308 (0.0414)
True Independent			-0.191 (0.120)
Pooled Treat X True Ind			0.0581 (0.123)
Constant	1.075*** (0.0800)	1.076*** (0.0799)	1.023*** (0.0820)
Observations	2024	2024	2024

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 3: Treatment effects on feelings toward President Trump

	Feeling Thermometer	Feeling Thermometer	Feeling Thermometer
Personal Scandal	2.477 (3.926)		
International Scandal	-0.214 (3.062)		
Political Corruption	-1.163 (3.056)		
Financial Corruption	-1.269 (3.058)		
Pooled Treatment		-0.674 (2.887)	
Pooled Treatment			-0.279 (3.065)
True Independent			9.976 (8.808)
Pooled Treat X True Ind			-2.096 (8.984)
Constant	73.96*** (5.877)	73.92*** (5.870)	77.06*** (6.032)
Observations	2015	2015	2015

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 4: Treatment effects on support for impeachment

	Impeach	Impeach	Impeach
Personal Scandal	-0.114 (0.114)		
International Scandal	-0.00786 (0.0887)		
Political Corruption	-0.0596 (0.0885)		
Financial Corruption	-0.0533 (0.0886)		
Pooled Treatment		-0.0451 (0.0835)	
Pooled Treatment			-0.0244 (0.0882)
True Independent			0.479* (0.257)
Pooled Treat X True Ind			-0.136 (0.262)
Constant	1.261*** (0.171)	1.270*** (0.171)	1.408*** (0.175)
Observations	2024	2024	2024

Standard errors in parentheses  
\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Tables 2<sup>4</sup>, 3 and 4<sup>5</sup> show the results of regression analyses run for each outcome; Approval, a Feeling Thermometer and support for Impeachment, respectively. Each table includes regressions run with each of the treatments individually, with the treatments pooled together, and with an interaction between the pooled treatments and a measure of true independents.<sup>6</sup> All regressions control for the following pretreatment covariates: age, ideology, party ID, gender, income, education, and Hispanic identity

Interestingly, the data demonstrates no significant effect of the treatment on any of the outcome measures. Running the four treatments on their own returned no

<sup>4</sup> A positive coefficient for this outcome indicates movement towards disapproval.

<sup>5</sup> A positive coefficient for this outcome indicates decreasing support for impeachment.

<sup>6</sup> Respondents who answered 'Independent' were then asked which party they felt closest to. Those who chose 'Neither' were classified as true independents.

significant changes in any of the three outcomes. Pooling the treatments together similarly resulted in no significant findings. Even among true independents, regressing the pooled treatments caused no significant movement among any of the outcomes.

To draw conclusions regarding true independents, tests were run examining the marginal effects of the interaction between true independents and the pooled treatments. For all three outcomes, true independents did see very slight movement away from the President. This was most apparent with the Feeling Thermometer test – which indicated a drop of two points for true independents post-treatment. However, a two point drop in a one-hundred point scale is not especially noteworthy, and, as mentioned above, the results were all insignificant. A larger sample size could perhaps expand on this finding.

#### *Effects by strength of Positive and Negative Partisanship*

Turning to the second focus of this paper; positive party identification was measured from a question asking respondents how closely they associate with their own preferred political party. Negative party identification was measured from a question asking respondents how they felt about the opposing party. Only Republican respondents were utilized for these tests, as the treatments were specifically critical of a Republican President. Tables 5 and 6 below show the results of regression analysis of both NPID and PPID against the Feeling Thermometer outcome. Only the feeling thermometer regressions are recorded below, as they provide the clearest results of all the outcomes.



Table 5: Pooled Treatments effect on NPID		Table 6: Pooled Treatments effect on PPID	
	Feeling Thermometer		Feeling Thermometer
Pooled Treatments	-7.688 (13.83)	Pooled Treatment	0.854 (10.07)
NPID	-0.381 (3.774)	PPID	12.13*** (3.584)
Pooled Treat X NPID	1.133 (3.829)	Pooled Treat X PPID	-2.482 (3.710)
Constant	79.85*** (14.94)	Constant	55.80*** (11.41)
Observations	593	Observations	593
Standard errors in parentheses		Standard errors in parentheses	
* $p < 0.10$ , ** $p < 0.05$ , *** $p < 0.01$		* $p < 0.10$ , ** $p < 0.05$ , *** $p < 0.01$	

No significant movement was observed for the interaction of either PPID and the pooled treatments, or NPID and the pooled treatments. Insignificant changes suggest that greater PPID caused support for the President to drop, while greater NPID caused support to rise. However, the movements were slight and insignificant. More research with a larger sample size could perhaps uncover greater movement between the two forms of partisanship.

### Conclusion:

Political science has little to say on the effects of individual scandals on voters, and whether some types resonate more than others. This is an especially interesting question given both the intense focus on such scandals by the political media, and the high number of scandals that the Trump candidacy and now Presidency have endured. As Democrats in congress push forward with investigations of the ethically-challenged White House, it is an important question as to which sorts of revelations might result in

partisans coming together. Therefore, the main purpose here was to build on the literature by applying current scandals to a pre-existing typology and assessing voter impressions in an online survey; with the hope that one or more such types might emerge as especially resonant to voters.

Unfortunately, the insignificance of the survey results across all outcomes and all types of voters makes it impossible to determine if any one type of scandal is especially worth promoting as a means of building a bipartisan consensus. Even among true independents, there appears to be no significant movement resulting from any of the four treatments. While these results are disappointing in the context of this paper's stated goal, the fact that no scandalous revelation can move any category of voter is interesting in its own right. It seems that Trump's claim of being able to shoot somebody without losing any voters was, perhaps, correct.

Revelations that the President has committed various crimes and acted in deeply immoral ways has no capacity to move voters in any significant fashion. Therefore, the idea amongst Democratic Party leaders that they can build a bipartisan case against President Trump through methodological investigation is likely mistaken. That is not to say that the House of Representatives should not do its duty and investigate corruption and illegal behavior by the Executive Branch – but that they should not do so with the intention of swaying any voters.

As to how it can be that voters are uninterested and unmoved by revelations of criminal activity by the sitting President, I offer two hypotheses. First, it may be a result

of media overexposure. Endless, hyper-sensationalist media coverage of oftentimes trivial scandals may have desensitized voters. When cable news shows are constantly droning on about difficult-to-grasp scandals that have little effect on people's lives, that coverage starts to lose meaning. Over time, voters may simply have lost any ability to be impacted by such coverage. An experiment that tested this theory would look into other variables that could potentially sway voters' positions on the President. For example, if policy positions could significantly cause voters to change their minds, that would indicate that the immovability found here is likely caused by the scandals themselves, and not due to any larger phenomena of American politics.

A second potential explanation comes from polarization. It may be that voters are simply immovable no matter the context or the revelation due to increasing levels of partisanship, specifically negative partisanship. As fear and hatred of the opposing party has grown over the last several decades, the cost of seeing a candidate of the opposing party hold office has correspondingly grown to outweigh the cost of allowing an individual of one's own party who has committed crimes to stay in office. The data gathered in this paper provides some evidence that this theory may be correct. Results indicated that Republicans who held higher levels of NPID were moved towards greater support of the President following treatment while those who held higher levels of PPID were moved towards diminished support. However, given that the movement was very slight and insignificant, definitive conclusions cannot be drawn.

Further research should be done to examine the differential effects of NPID and PPID in driving party loyalty in the face of negative information about one's preferred

candidate. The paper's findings regarding true independents could also be expanded upon – as it does appear that some of those voters may be susceptible to persuasion.

## **Appendix:**

### *Control*

While Rio de Janeiro may be best known for its fantastic beaches and hillside favelas, the city, which was Brazil's capital until 1960, remains one of the country's major business centers, and its downtown is crowded with high-rises and corporate headquarters. In 1991, a state law made it mandatory for commercial buildings with five or more stories to employ elevator attendants, which is the main reason the city still has a small army of some 4,000 operators, said Sandro das Neves, one of the leaders of the elevator operator union. Board elevators in all sorts of buildings downtown, and you will be greeted, again and again, by attendants, some immaculately uniformed. It feels as if you are stepping back in time for a few seconds, in a pleasant, yet also bewildering, way.

### *Treatment 1*

In court papers, Ms. Zervos said Mr. Trump twice kissed and groped her without her consent in 2007. The first time, she said, was during a job interview at Mr. Trump's New York office. The second incident occurred during a business meeting in a bungalow at the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles..... Nine other women eventually came forward with claims that Mr. Trump had acted inappropriately with them, and he vehemently denied those allegations, too. Ms. Zervos and most of the women went public with their claims after the release of an "Access Hollywood" tape that captured Mr. Trump boasting about kissing women and grabbing their genitals without invitation.

### *Treatment 2*

President Trump defied the nation's intelligence agencies and a growing body of evidence on Tuesday to declare his unswerving loyalty to Saudi Arabia, asserting that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's culpability for the killing of Jamal Khashoggi might never be known. In a remarkable statement that appeared calculated to end the debate over the American response to the killing of Mr. Khashoggi, the president said, "It

could very well be that the crown prince had knowledge of this tragic event — maybe he did and maybe he didn't!"... His statement, which aides said Mr. Trump dictated himself and reflected his deeply held views, came only days after the C.I.A. concluded that the crown prince, a close ally of the White House, had authorized the killing of Mr.

Khashoggi, a Saudi journalist and columnist for The Washington Post.

### *Treatment 3*

Michael D. Cohen, President Trump's former lawyer, made the extraordinary admission in court on Tuesday that Mr. Trump had directed him to arrange payments to two women during the 2016 campaign to keep them from speaking publicly about affairs they said they had with Mr. Trump. Mr. Cohen acknowledged the illegal payments while pleading guilty to breaking campaign finance laws and other charges, a litany of crimes that revealed both his shadowy involvement in Mr. Trump's circle and his own corrupt business dealings. He told a judge in United States District Court in Manhattan that the payments to the women were made "in coordination with and at the direction of a candidate for federal office," implicating the president in a federal crime.

### *Treatment 4*

Since Donald Trump declared his candidacy for president in late 2015, at least \$16.1 million has poured into Trump Organization-managed and branded hotels, golf courses and restaurants from his campaign, Republican organizations, and government agencies.

Because Trump's business empire is overseen by a trust of which he is the sole beneficiary, he profits from these hotel stays, banquet hall rentals and meals. "Trump appears to be commandeering federal resources in order to maximize revenues at Trump properties, and he does this by visiting properties close to the White House," said Kathleen Clark, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis and an expert in legal ethics. "And when he travels to the golf courses in Florida, Virginia and New Jersey, other agencies that are involved in supporting the president end up spending money."

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