Standing By Your Man: Factors in Media Coverage of Political Sex Scandals

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Standing By Your Man:
Factors in Media Coverage of Political Sex Scandals

Sarah N. Mahmood

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Prerequisite for Honors in Political Science

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Introduction

One could argue that political sex scandals have become so commonplace that there is no longer anything scandalous about them. Yet tawdry admissions of politicians’ extramarital dalliances regularly make the media’s front-pages. While some might dismiss coverage of politicians’ private lives as salacious gossip, the press believes that moral character is reflective of a politician’s ability to govern. Although the news media does not dictate the public’s view of the politician, the framing of the scandal and the characters are likely to have an impact on public perceptions. In this way, news coverage can influence a politician’s ability to survive the scandal.

This study analyzes how the news media covered six high-profile sex scandals: President Clinton’s affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky; Congressman Anthony Weiner’s illicit phone and Internet contact with several women; Governor Eliot Spitzer’s session with an escort, Senator David Vitter’s use of a prostitution agency; Senator John Edwards’ affair and child with a campaign worker, Rielle Hunter; and Governor Mark Sanford’s disappearance and affair with an Argentine woman.

As will be explained later in the introduction, several factors influence the tone of news coverage of a politician caught up in a sex scandal: (1) the egregiousness of the actions (2) the revelation of salacious details and (3) the impact on the politician’s job performance. An often overlooked factor in the tone of media coverage is the role played by the wife. Tropes concerning “the good wife” and “standing by your man” are common in scandal news. The wife is typically the primary victim of a sex scandal. How the press views the wife can influence how they cover the politician.
The first three factors – egregiousness, salaciousness and impact on job performance – represent the damage done by the scandal, while the wife’s support of her husband is a strategy for damage control. A politician cannot go back in time and change his egregious actions or prevent salacious details from leaking to the press. However, provided his wife is willing, they can work together to mitigate the crisis. As the only malleable factor after the scandal occurred, the wife’s support of the politician deserves special attention due to the implications it has for crisis management and public relations.

Through this research, I intended to see which factors resulted in non-negative (positive and neutral) news coverage. I hypothesized that the portrayal of the wife as an activist supporting her husband would result in non-negative media coverage of the scandal. Similarly, the lack of portrayal of the wife as a victim, or as someone working to undermine her husband (henceforth, “unsupportive activist”), would also be consistent with non-negative news coverage.

What is a Political Scandal?

It is important to understand what qualifies as a political scandal. There is a variety of literature on what constitutes a scandal in politics. According to Nancy Marion, a public figure should have been “accused of unethical or immoral behavior,” which constitutes behavior or an event “that is disgraceful, shameful or discredits someone” or that transgresses “societal norms, moral codes or values.”

Suzanne Garment focuses not on “the deed’s intrinsic nature,” but on the public’s reaction, and so defines a scandal as that triggered by “an act that affronts the moral sensibilities or pretensions of its

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1 Basinger 2012, p. 217.
audience” or that violates “a set of shared values.”

John Thompson states that the actions must “transgress or contravene certain values, norms or moral codes,” and that the disclosure of these actions has the power to damage the responsible individuals’ reputations, causing them to conceal the action. He also requires that “non-participants know or strongly believe that the actions took place, and that they publicly denounce the actions to express their disapproval.”

A distinction is drawn between scandals and controversies; scandals specifically refer to a clear violation of the law or conventional ethics, while controversies can include things like unpopular policy decisions, such as the Bush administration’s handling of Hurricane Katrina.

Drawing upon these definitions, I will define a political scandal as one in which a political figure has been accused of unethical and immoral behavior that is viewed by the public as shameful and a violation of shared social values. A political sex scandal would therefore be one where the unethical and immoral behavior is sexual. There must also be strong and widespread belief that this behavior took place. Thus, while Nikki Haley, Governor of South Carolina, was accused of having an extramarital affair, this would not qualify as a scandal, since the charges never gained credibility.

**Do Political Sex Scandals Occur More Frequently Today?**

Political sex scandals have not always dominated news headlines as they do today. This does not mean that politicians of the past were less likely to engage in sexual misbehavior; political sex scandals can be traced back to the Founders in the eighteenth century. The first political sex scandal implicated Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary

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3 *Thompson 2000*, p. 14
4 *Basinger 2012*, p. 217
of the Treasury, who was having an affair with a married woman. In fact, many of the stories from the past are far more transgressive than those that have ended politicians’ careers today. President Grover Cleveland won the 1884 Presidential election, despite accusations of fathering a child out of wedlock. Not only was the media then reluctant to report on sex scandals, but extramarital affairs also typically fell under the existing sexual norms for men.

**Changing Media Ethics in Reporting on Sex Scandals**

The news media functions as a gatekeeper, deciding what news is important enough to report to the public. In the past, as with President John F. Kennedy, the news media largely decided not to report on political sex scandals, considering it to be private information. Veteran CBS White House correspondent Robert Pierpoint remarked that, “There was quite a bit of discussion in the White House press corps about how we should handle this [Kennedy’s affairs]. It was an ethical problem of concern to us in part because he was fairly blatant about it. But overall the basic feeling was that we shouldn’t touch it because it wasn’t our business or the public’s business.”

Reporting on sex scandals hasn’t just become more acceptable in the present day, it is also now seen as a public duty. As CBS White House correspondent George Herman said, “An individual reporter may feel that something doesn’t violate his moral code, but it might violate somebody else’s moral code, and certainly when you vote for president one of the things you have a right to know is if a candidate is living by a moral code you approve of.” Reporters reason that voters have a right to know everything about their elected officials, including their moral character. Another journalist, Michael Kinsley of

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7 Ibid, p. 215.
The New Republic, said, “It’s up to the voters, not journalists, to decide what’s relevant. Denying voters this information, for fear they will give it more weight than it deserves, is patronizing.”

After the political scandals that rocked the latter half of the 20th century, such as Watergate, the press became reluctant to protect politicians. The scandals undermined respect for elected office. As Thompson explains, Watergate not only “helped to legitimate the activities of investigative journalists,” but also “brought the most hidden regions of the highest office of political power into the public domain, where, suddenly and unexpectedly, they were thrown open to view.” He states that the scandal “helped to foster a climate of skepticism in which no one, not even the President, is above suspicion.”

The changing nature of the media, particularly the 24-hour news cycle, has also made reporting these stories more profitable. “Sex sells and everybody’s interested in sex, so when there’s a sex scandal, it’s go everything – you’re talking about sex, you’re talking about power and in a lot of cases, money is involved. You are talking about how the mighty have fallen,” said Washington Post journalist Sally Quinn.

**Changing Social Codes**

Changing social codes have further contributed to the changing norms in scandal reporting. As a result of the women’s movement in the 1960s, male behavior that might have once been considered normal or acceptable is increasingly seen as inexcusable. As Thompson says:

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9 Thompson 2000, p. 110.
10 Ibid, p. 110.
11 Dagnes 2011, p. 95.
In a context where questions of gender inequality have been intensively discussed in the public domain, the double standards associated with promiscuous male behavior may be viewed with less equanimity, and behavior which could be interpreted as an unwanted sexual advance is likely to become an increasingly sensitive issue. These forms of behavior might have been tolerated in the past (and even regarded by some as perfectly normal expressions of male sexuality), but increasingly they have become the focus of critical scrutiny and open conflict.  

Historically, standards of sexual conduct were more lax for men (who typically run for office) than for women; male infidelity was often tolerated with the refrain that “boys will be boys.” *Washington Post* journalist David Broder attributed this attitude to why the press did not cover Kennedy’s affairs. “The reason we didn’t follow up [on the womanizing rumors] is clearly because of that ‘gentleman’s understanding’ that boys will be boys – and it was all boys. Nobody wanted to spoil the fun for anybody else…what people said was, ‘Well, shit, if you’re going to whistle on this guy…are we going to go back and start telling about each other?,” he said.  

The emergence of the New Right in the 1980s, also contributed to the stricter sexual codes for politicians. The New Right is conservative on social issues and promotes traditional family values. When New Right politicians who make personal morality a cornerstone of their campaigns are caught in sex scandals, journalists feel they have a responsibility to expose their hypocrisy.

**It’s the Character, Stupid**

As candidate-centered campaigns have become the norm, reporters and the public have become more interested in all aspects of candidates, including their character.

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Thompson describes this as the “politics of trust.”\textsuperscript{15} Many voters believe that a candidate’s character can shed insight to how the candidate will behave in office. David Barber sums up this point of view in his influential book, \textit{The Presidential Character}:

To understand what actual Presidents do and what potential Presidents might do, the first need is to know the whole person – not as some abstract embodiment of civic virtue, some scorecard of issue stands, or some reflection of a faction, but as a human being like the rest of us, a person trying to cope with a difficult environment. To that task a candidate brings an individual character, worldview, and political style.\textsuperscript{16}

Research shows that voters tend to share Barber’s opinion. An in-depth study of the 1992 Presidential elections, \textit{Crosstalk}, found that the “most weighty consideration” amongst voters in terms of predicting their vote for a particular candidate was character, which included qualities such as integrity, empathy, personality, and reliability. Integrity was the most important factor in character, followed by empathy. Further, the authors found that “the talk about candidates shifts from a greater emphasis on policy at the beginning of the campaign to a greater stress on character by its end.”\textsuperscript{17} Their data showed that while their interviewees cited the candidates’ policies and political affiliations less frequently throughout the campaign (decreasing from 16 to 11 percent), their considerations of the candidates’ character became more pronounced (increasing from 15 to 24 percent).\textsuperscript{18} The research also concluded that “people’s discussion of candidates’ character tends to be more closely in line with their ultimate voter choice than their talk on other dimensions of considerations. Thus, assessments of character may be the bottom line for voters.”\textsuperscript{19} This suggests the portrayal of candidate character, through the

\textsuperscript{15} Thompson 2000, p. 147.  
\textsuperscript{16} Jamieson 2003, p. 25.  
\textsuperscript{17} Just 1996, p. 229.  
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Ibid}, p. 229.
campaign and the news media play an important role in the vote decision. Thompson explains that:

People become more concerned with the character of the individuals who are (or might become) their leaders and more concerned about their trustworthiness, because increasingly this becomes the principal means of guaranteeing that political promises will be kept and that difficult decisions in the face of complexity and uncertainty will be made on the basis of sound judgment.20

**How the Media Cover Sex Scandals**

As noted earlier, the news media today cover politicians’ characters, and this has extended to reporting on sex scandals. In fact, compared to other political scandals, sex scandals receive the most media attention. Spitzer’s prostitution scandal and Senator Larry Craig’s gay sex scandal received more coverage than non-sex scandals, such as the Lewis Scooter Libby scandal concerning a CIA agent and Senator Ted Stevens’ political corruption scandal.21

Sex scandal coverage can play an important role in scandal rehabilitation, for positive coverage fosters a supportive environment for the politician, while negative coverage can encourage him to resign in order to escape the media scrutiny. Further, as the coverage is disseminated amongst the public, it can influence voters’ opinions of the politician as well. This is an example of the agenda-setting function of the press.22 Once the news media draws attention to an issue through repeated coverage, the public starts to recognize that issue as important. There is a strong relationship between the media’s emphasis on campaign issues, and the issues that are perceived as important by voters.23

21 Dagnes 2011, p. 95.
Although reporters can focus on the salaciousness of a scandal, coverage often extends beyond the “sex” part of the sex scandal. Journalists are typically more concerned with the egregiousness of the behavior – particularly if it involved lying or a cover-up – and whether the scandalous behavior impacted the politician’s job performance. As Carrie Sipes states:

While the sex scandal itself may provide lurid details and a frenzy of media coverage of the private lives of the politically powerful, it is the implications of the scandal that are ultimately important. Implications can range from being labeled a hypocrite, being seen as unethical, and being viewed as abusing power to more serious implications such as being found guilty of committing crimes.\(^{24}\)

Reporters decide which attributes of the scandal they should focus on. These media frames are the “central organizing idea[s] for news content that suppl[y] a context and suggest what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration.”\(^{25}\) The news media can present the scandal as a “sexual indiscretion, legal wrongdoing, private life, just sex, dramatic, prime-time style entertainment, political event.”\(^{26}\) Sipes states, “These [media] actors choose how much to cover the extramarital affair, how to construct and relay messages about it, and which aspects of the affair to emphasize or downplay.”\(^{27}\) The news media further provide possible solutions, as Robert Entman points out, by advocating for the politician to leave or remain in office. In other words, “The media don’t just tell us what to think about, they also may tell us how and what to think about, even what to do about it.”\(^{28}\)

\(^{24}\) *Ibid*, p. 94.
\(^{26}\) *Ibid*, p. 96.
\(^{27}\) *Ibid*, p. 94.
\(^{28}\) *Ibid*, p. 96.
Does the Public Use Sex Scandals to Evaluate Politicians?

It is not the sex scandal in itself that causes the public to question the politician’s qualification to hold office. When questioned about the matter directly, Americans do not feel that a sex scandal should end a politician’s career. A CBS News/New York Times poll asked respondents if it was “important for the press to tell the American people that a presidential candidate” had committed certain actions, and whether those would “be enough to make you vote against him, even if you agree with him on most of the issues.”

On a list that included accusations such as using cocaine, cheating on income tax, lying about a war record, being hospitalized for psychiatric treatment, and being guilty of drunk driving, infidelity received both the least amount of support from respondents as an offense that should be reported in the media, and the least likely offense to make the respondents vote against the candidate. It was the only offense that less than half of respondents felt should be reported by the press; just 40 percent of respondents felt that infidelity should be reported in the press, and 36 percent said that it would cause them to vote against the candidate. Data from the Pew Center reveals a similar pattern; according to a September 1999 survey, only 43 percent of respondents believed that the press should almost always report stories about a politician’s ongoing affairs.

In theory, therefore, the American public does not consider sex scandals to be important when voting for elected officials.

The polling data, however, has not been a good predictor of the public’s behavior. While Americans might say that infidelity isn’t cause to vote someone out of office, sex scandals have ended the careers of many politicians. After Jimmy Carter admitted in a

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30 Sabato 2000, p. xv.
Playboy interview that he had “lust in his heart,” not only did he lose 15 percentage points in national polls, but his lead, which had been the “largest ever recorded in a presidential race,” was wiped out.\(^{31}\) This was the public’s reaction after Carter had not even admitted actual wrongdoing; just that he had found women other than his wife attractive. Weiner went from being a frontrunner in the 2013 New York City mayoral election to trailing in the polls once he admitted that he had continued sexual relationships with women, after he had already resigned for the same offense in 2011.

While the public’s unsupportive reaction to candidates embroiled in sex scandals might seem to contradict the view that sex scandals shouldn’t be as widely reported, these ideas are actually not that incongruous. As mentioned earlier, voters take a politician’s character into account when evaluating their qualifications to hold office. Character or trustworthiness establishes a politician’s credibility, allowing the public to determine the honesty of the politician’s statements.\(^{32}\) Studies have shown that “character is a cornerstone of the presidency and a predictor of vote choice, and that perceptions of a political figure’s involvement in a scandal can harm a candidate’s credibility.”\(^{33}\) While voters might view a politician’s sex life as private, once the scandal is disclosed to the public, it sheds doubt on the politician’s character. Infidelity can make a politician appear to have poor judgment and be untrustworthy, qualities that don’t bode well for office. While the moral transgression in itself might not cause politicians to lose support from voters, it reflects poorly on the rest of their personality. Politicians perceived to be dishonest are viewed as less credible and are consequently less likely to be elected.\(^{34}\)

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\(^{33}\) Ibid, p. 235.
\(^{34}\) Ibid, p. 235.
the *Crosstalk* study mentioned earlier, voters considered integrity and empathy to be cornerstones of character. Not only does infidelity violate most Americans’ conception of integrity, it also displays a blatant disregard for the aggrieved spouse’s feelings. Even here, though, the public is not so much outraged over the actual infidelity itself, but by the rationalization that if politicians cannot be considerate and faithful to their own spouses, they cannot be trusted to be loyal to the public.

**Increased Visibility of the Political Family**

Politicians have accepted the public’s interest in their private lives. When running for President in 2008, Barack Obama said, “If you are applying for the presidency of the United States of America, then by definition you have given up your privacy; people are going to want to know what you have done in your life and what you stand for.”\(^{35}\) In order to cater to this interest, politicians have started to bring their families into the limelight. The political family plays an integral role in proving that the politician is a morally principled person. Political spouses make frequent appearances on the campaign trail to show the personal side of a candidate and vouch for their character. For example, in the 2012 Presidential election, Republican candidate Mitt Romney’s wife, Ann Romney, starred in ads and spoke to audiences about how her husband had stood by her when she was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis. The spouse plays a key role in demonstrating that the politician is not just a qualified professional, but also a trustworthy and reliable person. Through her personal story, Ann Romney was offering proof that Romney would stand by the public in troubled times, just as he had stood by her.

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\(^{35}\) Stanyer 2013, p. 1.
The greater frequency of sex scandals today can be partially attributed to the increased visibility of the political family. As voters build greater connections with a political spouse, a politician’s infidelity against the spouse can be more personal for the public. Further, as politicians themselves have brought the private into the public, it has become more justifiable to scrutinize their private lives. As Roger Mudd, a broadcast journalist who anchored programs on NBC and CBS, said:

In order to convince voters that they are wholesome and trustworthy people, candidates have opened up for public inspection their own lives, their marriages, their children. They use their wives, use their homes, and willingly go public with all those private moments that they think will help them get elected. And it seems to me that once a public official does that, the line shifts rather rapidly to a point where virtually nothing remains private. It is only when those private moments damage the candidate that you hear the cry, 'you are invading my privacy.'

Even the Clintons, who famously shielded their daughter Chelsea from the press, recognized the necessity of introducing her to voters. The week that Clinton had accepted the Democratic nomination for President, Chelsea was featured on the cover of People with her parents in 1992. Their media adviser explained that while the Clintons did not want to use Chelsea as a “prop for the campaign,” keeping her invisible would not allow voters to “see this side of his life which is so important to him.” This concern was well-founded. During Howard Dean’s campaign in the 2004 Democratic primary, many wondered why his wife hadn’t joined him on the campaign trail, even though she had explained that she wanted to focus on her work as a pediatrician. It has become almost necessary for candidates to bring their families into the spotlight, but it is also a double-edged sword; as Larry Sabato and co-authors state, “candidates who seek privacy for their families in the press must apply the same standards to their own campaigns. But

37 Sabato 2000, p. 22.
those who invite journalists into their living room should not be surprised when the press follows them into the bedroom.\textsuperscript{39}

**Why Study Political Sex Scandals?**

Scandals have had far-reaching effects on American politics. They undermine the public’s trust in political figures, creating a culture of distrust and suspicion. Further, they can also create instability by causing the politician to resign, or by overshadowing discussion on policy issues. It is therefore important to study the aftermath of these scandals, especially in regard to how the media processes the events. Constant media scrutiny, or unfavorable press, does not necessarily have to impede a politician’s rehabilitation, but it certainly makes it a lot more difficult. Positive press, on the other hand, makes it appear as though the politician has support, and a chance at survival.

To successfully rehabilitate themselves after a sex scandal, politicians must not just ask for forgiveness, but re-establish their credibility. They must prove that their moral character is intact and that the scandal was just a temporary lapse of judgment. To do this, they need help, as the public has little incentive to trust someone just accused of dishonesty. Just as political spouses vouch for politicians’ character on the campaign trail, they are also often called upon to help the politician mitigate the effects of the scandal. As the aggrieved party, the spouse’s support is especially meaningful.\textsuperscript{40} The politician is trying to tell the public: if she can look past it given my other positive traits, you should be able to as well. As Hinda Mandell states:

\begin{quote}
[The political wife] participates in public events to show her support for him demonstrate her investment in the marriage, and vouch for the husband’s integrity as a man and a politician. Her ‘stamp of approval’ becomes ever more critical –
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{39} Sabato 2000, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{40} Ruggerio 2012, p. 146.
and controversial – when the husband-politician acts or is accused of acting in a manner that directly calls his integrity into question...It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that if politicians want and need their wives’ public support in good times, then most definitely they would seek to secure their wives’ support in bad times.41

Therefore, political spouses are often present at press conferences where politicians admit their sexual wrongdoing. While there is little research to prove whether or not this is an effective strategy, it has become common enough that the press has even started using a phrase for it – “standing by your man.” This study argues that the support of the political spouse does in fact result in non-negative news coverage of the scandal-ridden politician.

41 Ibid, p. 146.
Methods

In order to determine which factors result in non-negative news coverage of a scandal, I conducted a news analysis of the coverage surrounding six case studies: President Bill Clinton, Congressman Anthony Weiner (NY), Governor Eliot Spitzer (NY), Senator David Vitter (LA), Senator John Edwards (NC), and Governor Mark Sanord (SC).

I selected news articles and editorials from four major national newspapers (the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, and USA Today), as well as from the two major newspapers from the state where the politician was elected or running for office. Both the national and state newspapers were chosen based on their high circulation numbers, as I wanted to use articles that reached a large audience. I included both conservative (Wall Street Journal) and liberal newspapers (New York Times), in order to account for different perspectives. Op-eds were omitted from the analysis, because how they are commissioned varies amongst the different outlets. I retained editorials because they represent the official views of the newspapers. As Clinton and Edwards were elected or pursuing national office when their scandals broke, their articles were only chosen from the major national newspapers. Their high-profile status ensured a sufficient sample size, in spite of the omission of state newspapers.

I focused on newspapers specifically because their articles are published both online and in print. The two mediums reach different segments of the population; younger Americans cite the Internet as their main source of news, while older Americans
consume their news through newspapers, after broadcast television. I excluded television news coverage from the analysis because broadcast news has changed drastically over a short span of time. Programming has shifted away from the traditional anchor model, and has become more partisan and opinion-based. As I was looking for trends in press coverage since the 1990s (when the Clinton scandal took place), the changes in broadcast media added too many extraneous variables in this study. I opted not to include blogs for the same reason, since blogs were not as popular during Clinton’s scandal in 1998 as they are today.

As this study also concerns political rehabilitation, I looked at coverage starting with pieces published when the politician first publicly acknowledged the scandal, whether that was denial or acceptance of the charge. Acknowledgement is an appropriate starting point, because it means that the scandal has become significant enough for the politician to address it. The time frame ended with articles written once the politician faced consequences for the scandal (such as resignation or impeachment), or when it appeared that the scandal had subsided (such as decreased pressure from the public to resign or acquittal). I have explained the details of the specific time frames in the pertinent chapters.

I used three main criteria in evaluating whether or not an article was suitable for analysis: (1) the piece was an article or editorial from the New York Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, USA Today, or one of the two major state newspapers of the state the politician was elected or running for office in, (2) it fit the time frame, which began with the politician’s public acknowledgement of the scandal and ended as the

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42 Caumont 2013, October 16.
scandal subsided, and (3) two thirds of the content focused on the politician, rather than on other actors.

Since fuzzy set content qualitative analysis (fsQCA) analysis works best with at least 30 cases, I aimed to choose at least 35 articles per politician (I will explain why I chose fsQCA for this study later in this chapter). Depending on how many news stories were published about a scandal, in some cases I had to choose the entirety of the coverage. In cases where the scandal produced extensive coverage, I first narrowed down my sample to articles that fit the time period and focus criteria, and from those I chose every $n^{th}$ story, with the $n$ depending on the number of stories available.

I coded the tone of each article according to whether it was positive or negative towards the politician overall, using the question “Would the politician in question be happy to see this article published?” Factors influencing this consideration included whether or not the article focused on the politician’s supporters rather than detractors, or whether the article seemed to downplay the scandal rather than sensationalize it. In editorials, it was obvious whether or not the piece was positive or negative towards the politician.

Then, I coded how the wife was portrayed in the article: as an activist supporting her husband, an activist working to undermine her husband, or a victim. I wanted to accurately account for the range of ways a wife can show her support or disapproval, from standing next to her husband as he admits his guilt, to defending him publicly, or providing unflattering information about the politician to the press.

To identify contributory factors in the coverage, I also coded for the article’s focus, e.g. on the salaciousness of the scandal, the egregiousness of the scandal, and the
scandalous behavior’s impact on the politician’s job performance. The coding sheet can be found in Figure 1 on page 27. I hypothesized that a lack of focus on salaciousness, egregiousness, and impact on job performance would result in non-negative media coverage. Of these factors, I believed that egregiousness would be the most salient factor.

I used fsQCA to analyze the coded articles. This statistical method is a set-theoretic analysis technique developed by Charles Ragin that “bridges the gap between qualitative and quantitative analysis.” Set-theoretic analysis provides an alternative to conventional quantitative variable based on methods like correlation and regression, since it does not “disaggregate cases into independent, analytically separate aspects but instead treats configurations as different types of cases.” fsQCA views cases as “configurations of attributes resembling overall types,” and compares the cases to “strip away attributes that are unrelated to the outcome in question.” John Downey and James Stanyer discuss the advantage of set theoretic thinking over correlation by using the example of democracy and development. They point out that democracy and development have a weak correlation because there are many democratic countries that are less developed. Set theoretic thinking, though, would highlight “a very strong set theoretic relationship, in that developed countries are a subset of democratic countries.”

Using Boolean algebra, fsQCA identifies the causal conditions that can lead to a specific outcome. Ragin describes that the “Boolean methods of logical comparison represent each case as a combination of causal and outcome conditions. These combinations can be compared with each other and then logically simplified through a

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43 Ragin 2006.
44 Fiss, 2011, p. 393-420.
bottom-up process of paired comparison….the data matrix is reformulated as a ‘truth
table’ and reduced in a way that parallels the minimization of switching circuits.”

fsQCA has been used in other media analysis studies, notably in Stanyer’s study of
international political scandals.49

I chose to use fsQCA in this study because the parameters of the program fit the
data that I had. For one, fsQCA can be used to accurately analyze samples as small as 10
cases. As my samples ranged between 20-62 articles, I needed software that could be
used for small to moderate samples. Further, rather than identifying only one variable that
leads to the outcome, fsQCA examines how different causal combinations come together.
This was of particular importance to me because I wanted to understand which factors
worked in conjunction with each other to result in non-negative news coverage. As Ragin
states:

Typically, qualitatively oriented scholars examine only a few cases at a time, but
their analyses are both intensive -- addressing many aspects of cases -- and
integrative -- examining how the different parts of a case fit together, both
contextually and historically. By formalizing the logic of qualitative analysis,
QCA makes it possible to bring the logic and empirical intensity of qualitative
approaches to studies that embrace more than a handful of cases -- research
situations that normally call for the use of variable-oriented, quantitative
methods.50

Another appealing aspect of this method is its incorporation of “fuzzy sets.” Other
statistical methods tend to divide variables into “crisp sets” that only distinguish between
membership and non-membership; for example, a politician is an incumbent or he is not.
However, some variables cannot be divided so easily into those two categories;
sometimes, their membership is “fuzzy.” fsQCA accounts for this partial membership in a

48 Ragin 2006.
49 Stanyer 2013.
50 Ragin 2006.
category. By using fsQCA, I was able to account for the different degrees of membership amongst the various factors in my study. For example, news articles that included transcripts of Weiner’s chats with women were clearly salacious. Articles that discussed Edwards’ paternity claims, though, were not explicit in the same way, but the mentions of the paternity scandal were still tawdry. With fsQCA, I was able to precisely account for this variation in salaciousness.

In sum, fsQCA analysis works for studies where there is a hypothesis about the “underlying causal structure of an outcome being studied.” This causal structure is expected to be “complex, equifinal (there are different pathways to an outcome) and conjunctural (conditions are often sufficient only in combination).” Further, the causal conditions are also fuzzy and cannot be incorporated into crisp sets. For my application of fsQCA, full membership in a set was indicated at 1.0, non-membership was indicated by a 0.0, and partial membership started at 0.5. After identifying the causal conditions, fsQCA provides data on the consistency, or “the degree to which the empirical evidence is consistent with the set theoretic relation in question,” of the solution. I have included an example of results from fsQCA in figures 2-5 on pages 28-30 to demonstrate how the software works.

In addition to this qualitative analysis, I conducted a comprehensive review of academic material that has been written on political sex scandals. I used past research to analyze the different rehabilitation strategies used by the politician, as well as the press’s approach to coverage of the scandal. Through this research, I examined the factors that resulted in non-negative news coverage in a political sex scandal.

51 Kent 2008.
52 Kent 2008.
Figure 1: Coding sheet for sampled articles.
How Does fsQCA Work?

fsQCA analysis first creates a fuzzy truth table with the supplied data. The truth table displays all possible combinations of causal sets for the variable in question. The numbers below the variables indicate membership (1) or non-membership (0). The “number” column indicates how many cases exhibit the configuration in that row. The consistency displays the “score of the causal combination, weighted by the relevance of each case. The membership score of a causal combination is the minimum fuzzy score in each of the conditions.” After sorting the table by the consistency score, the researcher should look for a gap in the consistency scores. Configurations before the gap should be coded as “1” (membership), and configurations after the gap should be coded as “0” (non-membership).

![Sample truth table](image)

Figure 2: Sample truth table constructed to explain fsQCA methodology.

fsQCA then conducts a standard analysis, which contains three solutions: complex, parsimonious, and intermediate. The complex solution makes no simplifying assumptions, and if there are a large number of variables, it will provide unwieldy results. The parsimonious solution uses remainder rows to simplify the results, and the intermediate solution uses coded assumptions to simplify the results. It falls between the complex

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54 Elliot
55 Kent 2008
56 Ragin 2006
57 Elliot
58 Elliot
and parsimonious solution in terms of simplifying data. I provided all three solutions for the cases, but focused on the parsimonious and intermediate solutions.

Figure 3: Sample complex solution constructed to explain fsQCA methodology.

Figure 4: Sample parsimonious solution constructed to explain fsQCA methodology.
Figure 5: Sample intermediate solution constructed to explain fsQCA methodology.
**Bill Clinton and Anthony Weiner**

There is a compelling case for studying the Clinton and Weiner scandals together. For one, Clinton’s scandal marked the emergence of the Internet in scandal politics, as the online blog the *Drudge Report* broke news of the affair. Thirteen years later, another blog, BigGovernment.com, was responsible for Weiner’s downfall. Weiner has even claimed that he’d be mayor of New York “if the Internet didn’t exist.”\(^5^9\) There are also close ties between Clinton and Weiner through their wives: Huma Abedin serves as a close aide to Hillary Rodham Clinton. In the wake of the two scandals, both wives came to their husbands’ defense, but only Clinton survived politically. These cases will demonstrate how a wife’s support can help a politician survive a scandal, but only up to a certain point.

**Bill Clinton**

President Clinton was hardly the first president to have an extramarital affair while in the White House, but the media circus surrounding his scandal was unprecedented. While reporters may have looked the other way during President Kennedy’s time, the competitive 24-hour cable news landscape made no scandal untouchable, presidential or not. Sabato describes the period from 1941 to 1966 as a period of “lapdog” journalism, when journalists “served and reinforced ideas presented by the political establishment,” and the period from 1966 to 1974 as one in which “reporters engaged in ‘watchdog’ journalism, wherein where they scrutinized the political

\(^{5^9}\) Hutchinson 2013, October 17.
establishment and investigated statements made by political officials,” and the present day as one where they have adopted a “junkyard dog” style of journalism:

It has become a spectacle without equal in modern American politics: the news media, print and broadcast, go after a wounded politician like sharks in a feeding frenzy. The wounds may have been self-inflicted, and the politician may richly deserve his or her fate, but the journalists now take center stage in the process, creating the news as much as reporting it, changing both the shape of election-year politics and the contours of government.⁶⁰

It was in this context that details emerged of Clinton’s affair with Monica Lewinsky, a 22-year-old intern at the White House, from November 1995 to March 1997. As the details of the scandal are complex and long-winded, a concise timeline has been provided on page 80 at the end of the chapter.⁶¹

News of the scandal first broke to the public on January 17, 1998, when The Drudge Report reported that Newsweek had decided not to publish a story they were following about the affair. This was not entirely accurate, as Newsweek was waiting to publish the article until they had confirmed more details of the story. The story had leaked to the press after Lewinsky signed an affidavit in the Paula Jones case stating that she never had a physical relationship with President Clinton. However, Lewinsky had confided details of the affair to a co-worker in the Defense Department, Linda Tripp, who had been secretly recording the conversations. Upon learning of Lewinsky’s false testimony in the affidavit, Tripp delivered the tapes to Kenneth Starr, the Independent Counsel who was investigating President Clinton on other charges, including the Whitewater scandal. Tripp had also told Lucianne Goldberg, a literary agent, about the affair, who then told Michael Isikoff, a reporter at Newsweek, and then sent a tip to the Drudge Report once Newsweek delayed publication.

⁶⁰ Denton 2003, p. 248.
⁶¹ Barkham 1998, November 18.
After the sting of being scooped, *Newsweek* published the piece online on January 21, the first time they had ever put a breaking news piece online before publishing it in print. The *Newsweek* editors were concerned that daily publications would piece together the story before the weekly magazine would have the chance to print it. Woody Klein thus argues that coverage of the scandal “marked the official arrival of the digital age in the news business.” On January 21, *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* reported on the affair. They published their stories a full four days after the *Drudge Report* had broken the scandal initially, highlighting the more rigorous standards of established print newspapers in confirming a story.

After the mainstream media began reporting on the accusations, Clinton denied the “sexual relationship” in an interview on *The Newshour with Jim Lehr* on PBS. The interview had been scheduled before the scandal broke. Clinton planned to speak about his upcoming State of the Union address, but he took the opportunity to address the new allegations instead. “I did not ask anyone to tell anything other than the truth. There is no improper relationship. And I intend to cooperate with this inquiry,” he said. His choice of words – namely the “there is no improper relationship” as opposed to “there was no improper relationship” – sparked speculation that Clinton was being evasive by playing semantics. However, after Morton Kondracke of *Roll Call* questioned him about the tenses later in a phone interview later, Clinton firmly said, “The relationship was not sexual.”

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62 Klein 2010, p. 73.
63 Kalb 2001, p. 140.
64 Ibid, p. 140.
65 Ibid, p. 141.
Rodham Clinton rose immediately to Clinton’s defense. Two days later, Rodham Clinton told a reporter, “Certainly I believe they’re [the charges] false… You know, I wouldn’t say that it is not hard [hearing the charges]. It is difficult and awful anytime someone you care about, you love, you admire is attacked and subjected to such relentless accusations as my husband has been. But I also have now lived with this for more than six years. And I have seen how these charges evaporate and disappear as they’re given the light of day.”

Behind the scenes, she took part in the top-secret deliberations Clinton was having with his lawyers on how to manage the scandal. She also called his supporters and former campaign aides to ask for guidance and rally them in his defense. As Marvin Kalb put it, “where there was smoke, there was Hillary.”

In his regularly scheduled press conference on January 26, Clinton firmly denied the accusations again. “I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky. I never told anybody to lie, not a single time; never. These allegations are false. And I need to go back to work for the American people,” he said. Rodham Clinton was present during the statement, standing near the podium.

On January 27, Rodham Clinton appeared on NBC’s Today Show to defend Clinton. She told host Matt Lauer, “The great story here for anybody willing to find it and write about it and explain it is this vast right-wing conspiracy that has been conspiring

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66 Ibid, p. 142
67 Ibid, p. 198
68 Ibid, p. 198
against my husband since the day he announced for president.” An article from the

*Washington Post* described how vital Rodham Clinton’s defense had been for Clinton:

> Using a nationally televised interview as her forum, she [Rodham Clinton] assumed a familiar and crucial role as Bill Clinton's first defender. She said she knew him better than anyone in the world, still loved him, and fully believed his denial of allegations that he had entered into a sexual relationship with a White House intern and had urged the young woman to lie about it.

The first lady's determined performance on NBC's ‘Today’ dramatically reshaped the debate over the sex scandal that erupted last week and now threatens President Clinton's political survival. Her words at once established a clear line of counterattack for Clinton's loyalists, whose defense strategy until yesterday had seemed confused if not half-hearted, boosted morale at the White House.69

Polls taken immediately after Rodham Clinton’s appearance on the program showed a spike of 8 percentage points in Clinton’s job approval rating from the day before, suggesting that her support had helped him, at least for the time being.70 The increase in public support for Clinton after his denial speech, as well as Rodham Clinton’s interview on the *Today Show*, has been termed the “speech plus Hillary” effect.71

The story stalled for a few months until July 28, when Lewinsky received transactional immunity in exchange for testifying in front of a grand jury about her affair with Clinton. With the allegations now harder to deny, Clinton admitted to a grand jury on August 17 that he had engaged in an “improper physical relationship” with Lewinsky. That evening, he gave a nationally televised statement confessing that his relationship with Lewinsky was “not appropriate.”72 This time, Rodham Clinton was not by his side.

An article in the *Washington Post* noted that:

> Hillary Rodham Clinton, who held her husband's hand at church Sunday morning and whose staunch defense of him through sex scandals in the past has been so

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72 Baker and Harris 1998, August 18.
critical to his political survival, did not join him for last night's statement. The Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, who visited the White House and prayed with her late Sunday night, said the first lady was feeling ‘a sense of humiliation’. Rodham Clinton’s absence from the conference did not mean that she had withdrawn her support for the President. Instead, her press secretary, Marsha Berry, delivered a statement the next day, explaining that while Rodham Clinton had been “misled” about the relationship with Lewinsky, she remained “committed to her marriage and “believes in this president and loves him very much.” An article in the Washington Post noted that:

Berry's unusual public comments about the first lady's attitude toward her marriage appeared to have three goals: To satisfy press clamor for Rodham Clinton's reaction to the president's admission Monday night of an improper relationship with another woman. To reassure the public that – however egregious her husband's behavior – Rodham Clinton was standing by him. And to make clear that – while the president may have knowingly misled the American public – the first lady did so only inadvertently and because she herself had not been told the truth.

The Clintons also left for a vacation to Martha’s Vineyard that day. Their daughter, Chelsea Clinton, symbolically unified the family by walking in between her parents, holding both of their hands. Rodham Clinton and Chelsea were leaning away from Clinton, signifying their disapproval, but still emphasizing their solidarity with him.

74 Marcus 1998, August 19.
75 Ibid.
A White House official told the *Washington Post* that Rodham Clinton was playing “two roles, a private role, which was a hurt spouse looking for reconciliation with her husband, looking for some accountability from her husband…and a public role that she played when she was with her president and the president's advisers, and that was being one tough shrewd lawyer and political adviser.”  

Reverend Jesse Jackson described her support as a show of strength, rather than a sign of submission. He told the press, “Rather than jump ship or turn on her husband, she turned to him with her daughter and offered love and support when he needed it the most and perhaps deserved it the least. Many women would have been nursing their wounds or in private solitude. She was in the room helping to chart the plan for his testimony.” While some feminists were outraged that Rodham Clinton supported Clinton through the Lewinsky scandal, those close to the White House emphasized that Rodham Clinton was an empowered wife playing a crucial role in rescuing her husband’s presidency.

As Clinton had previously denied having sexual relations with Lewinsky in his deposition for the Jones lawsuit, Starr argued that Clinton had perjured himself. Clinton said that his original testimony had not been perjurious since sexual relations had been defined in the deposition as the “intent to gratify or arouse the sexual desire of any person.” With Lewinsky, he argued, there had been no activity by him, where he had been the *actor*, because he had received oral sex for *his* pleasure, not hers. Believing this to be semantics, the Republican-controlled House of Representatives impeached Clinton in December for perjury and abuse of power. Ultimately, the Senate acquitted

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76 Baker and Harris 1998, August 18.  
77 Ibid.  
79 Ibid.
Clinton in February 1999. The scandal that had played out for over a year in the public eye was finally over.

Media coverage of the scandal was relentless. During the week the scandal broke, from January 22-27, the *New York Times* ran 96 stories on scandal, an average of 16 per day.\footnote{Kalb 2010, p. 153, 156.} The *Washington Post* ran even more, at 120 stories, an average of 20 per day.\footnote{Ibid, p. 153, 156.} The media frenzy also produced coverage below the usual standards of these publications. At least 64 percent of the *Washington Post*’s early reporting was based on anonymous sourcing, more than triple their average.\footnote{Ibid, p. 129.} Martin Baron, then the Associate Managing Editor of the *New York Times*, also criticized the newspaper’s coverage for not attributing sources and failing to confirm reports. Coverage of the scandal also overshadowed other aspects of politics. Seventy five percent of all questions posed to Mike McCurry, Clinton’s press secretary, at the midday briefings pertained to the scandal, even as Clinton’s State of the Union speech and a visit by Yasser Arafat to the White House approached.\footnote{Ibid, p. 138.}

Yet the constant coverage of the scandal did not reduce public support for Clinton, who continually received high public approval ratings throughout the period. Even in the immediate aftermath of the Lewinsky scandal, Clinton’s job approval rating was 10 points higher at 70 percent than it was previously, according to a poll taken 10 days after Clinton denied having sexual relations with Lewinsky.\footnote{Zaller, 1998, p 182.} According to Gallup polls from January to October, Clinton’s “presidential approval rose to 69 percent and never fell
below 60 percent approval, peaking at 69 percent.\textsuperscript{85} These approval ratings – matched only by Presidents Reagan and Nixon– were all the more remarkable because they “were the highest of his presidency to date.”\textsuperscript{86} As Craig Allen Smith points out, “Clinton was actually more popular during this scandal than he was before it.”\textsuperscript{87} Further, while both Reagan, during the Iran Contra scandal, and Nixon, during Watergate, had “lost support among their core supporters to varying degrees…this scandal [with Lewinsky] seem[ed] simply to have galvanized and energized the 35 percent of the public who had already opposed Clinton.”\textsuperscript{88}

The high approval ratings did not mean that the public approved of Clinton’s behavior. After Clinton’s secret deposition in January, ABC News poll found that 54 percent of respondents thought Clinton had been untruthful.\textsuperscript{89} There was also a sizable decline in the percentage of Midwesterners who believed Bill Clinton was moral. Polls showed a drop from 25 percent in 1996 to 12 percent by 1998 amongst Republicans, from 77 percent to 49 percent amongst Democrats, and from 49 percent to 26 percent amongst Independents.\textsuperscript{90} However, the percentage of Midwesterners who believed that Clinton was a strong leader was the same in 1998 as when he was elected in 1992 and 1998 (around 75 percent).\textsuperscript{91} This indicates that the public does not necessarily connect private morality with leadership capability.

Even as the public disapproved of Clinton’s actions, they were critical of what they saw as the media’s excessive focus on the scandal. Nine days after the news broke,
an ABC News/Washington Post poll found that 75 percent of respondents believed that
the news media had “given the intern matter too much coverage.” A Gallup poll for
CNN and USA Today taken a week into the scandal revealed that 72 percent of
respondents felt there was “too much coverage of the scandal.” A Harris Poll that
“continued to ask periodically whether people agreed or disagreed that ‘the media have
given far too much attention to the Monica Lewinsky affair’” found that in February 18-
23, 1998, 84 percent believed that too much attention had been paid, and by November
11-15, it increased to its record high of 89 percent. According to J. Michael Hogan,
“these figures, of course, are about as close to a public consensus as one ever sees in a
public opinion poll.” A poll sponsored by the Media Studies Center asked its
respondents to choose amongst various words to describe the news coverage of the
scandal. The most popular words were “disappointing,” disgusting,” and
“irresponsible.” The most popular word was “excessive,” chosen by 80 percent of the
sample, and the second was “embarrassing,” chosen by 71 percent. In early August, a
CNN/USA Today poll found that three fifths of respondents said that they wished they
knew less about the scandal than they actually did. By January 1999, only 18 percent
were “interested in hearing more about the impeachment case,” while 81 percent that they
were “sick of it.” As Hogan posits:

We may have witnessed in the Lewinsky scandal something akin to the legendary
‘bounce’ in John F. Kennedy’s approval ratings following the botched Bay of
Pigs invasion; a ‘rally effect’; grounded not in approval of the president’s actions
but in empathy for a beleaguered president. In the final analysis, the public may

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97 Ibid, p. 293.
not have approved of Clinton personally, but neither did they approve of the news media hounding the president about his sex life – to the exclusion of more substantive news – for more than a year.  

This rally effect explains why two of Clinton’s highest approval ratings occurred on the days that Congress was scheduled to vote on impeachment and then acquittal. It was a “rally to Clinton on the two key days of judgment.”

Despite the scandal, voters still felt Clinton was the right man for the office of the presidency. A 52-34 percent majority thought Clinton could do a better job than Republicans, and that the investigation interfered with his ability to carry out the work that they wanted the government to do. Unlike the press, they also believed that his affair was a private matter. According to a CBS poll taken on March 17, 1998, which asked, “Do you think of this whole situation (Bill Clinton’s sexual relations with former White House intern Monica Lewinsky and encouraging her to lie about it) more as a private matter having to do with Bill Clinton’s personal life, or more as a public matter having to do with Bill Clinton’s job as President?”, 62 percent of the respondents said that the matter was private, compared to 31 percent whom felt it was public. These results were similar to an ABC News/Washington Post poll taken on February 20, 1998, asking, “Suppose for a moment that Clinton did have an extramarital affair while in office. Would you say that’s his private business and it has nothing to do with his doing his job; or would you say it reflects on his judgment and calls into question whether he

98 Ibid, p. 293
99 Ibid, p. 281
100 Ibid, p. 281
101 Ibid, p. 182
102 Ibid, p. 259
can do his job?” Of the respondents, 33 believed that it reflected on his judgment and 66 percent felt it had nothing to do with it. 103

The disconnect between the news media’s constant coverage of the scandal, and the public’s decreasing appetite for it, does not necessarily imply that the press had an agenda against Clinton. It was likely the result of the difference in frames between the public and the press. Thomas Patterson describes two frames, which he refers to as “schemas,” that impact how people view politicians and the political process: the game and governing. 104 Reporters are more greatly influenced by the game schema, where they see politics as a strategic game, and this is ultimately reflected in the news product. 105

The game schema is also influenced by news conventions, which emphasize drama and controversy, and a narrative in which there is a winner and a loser. The public, on the other hand, sees politics much differently. Voters “view politics primarily as a means of choosing leaders and solving their problems,” also known as the governing schema. 106 While the game and the governing schemas are not mutually exclusive, reporters rely more on the game schema and voters typically gravitate towards the governing schema. The gaming schema tends to result in more negative view of politics, because it suggests that politicians are motivated by self-interest. 107 Scandal coverage derives from this strategy, as it uses status or reputation as the currency stake to be won or lost in the game. 108 Reporters covering the Clinton scandal also saw it as an attention-grabbing subject worthy of extensive coverage. Kalb states, “For months, the Washington press

103 Ibid, p. 259.
104 Ibid, p. 250.
105 Ibid, p. 250.
corps had felt ‘irrelevant.’ According to Michael Oreskes, bureau chief of the New York Times, ‘They felt themselves adrift, their editors putting Washington news alongside foreign news as ignorable stuff.’ Now, he told me, ‘Monica gave them a new lease on life.’ And they seized it.”

In this study, I examined 62 articles from the New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, and Wall Street Journal. Since the timeline of the Clinton scandal is so extensive, I looked at coverage of three key events of the Clinton trial: one, when the scandal broke (January 21-February 20, 1998); two, when Clinton admitted to the affair and testified in front of a grand jury (August 17-October 12, 1998); and three, when he was impeached by the House of Representatives and then acquitted by the Senate (December 10, 1998-February 17, 1999). To ensure that the sample was inclusive of all the outlets, I chose 5 articles per outlet per timeframe. Two exceptions were made in period two, where I chose 6 pieces from the Washington Post and New York Times. As I included the main articles covering the events as well as editorials, I had to accommodate for the numerous editorials published in the Washington Post and New York Times during this period.

The parsimonious solution shows that a lack of egregiousness and the portrayal of Rodham Clinton were consistent with positive coverage for Clinton. The intermediate solution identified a lack of focus on egregiousness and salaciousness, the portrayal of Rodham Clinton as an activist, and the lack of portrayal of Rodham Clinton as a victim as the causal conditions that resulted in non-negative coverage. Since none of the articles focused on how Clinton’s scandalous behavior impacted his job performance, or portrayed Rodham Clinton as an unsupportive activist, those variables were not included

in the analysis. This makes sense, since articles that did not focus on the egregiousness of Clinton’s actions, and represented Rodham Clinton as an activist didn’t emphasize the crime (infidelity and a potential cover-up) or the victim (Rodham Clinton, as Clinton’s wife). Without those two components, a story had little basis for portraying Clinton negatively.

Figure 8: fsQCA truth table for coverage of the Clinton scandal.
Figure 9: fsQCA complex solution for coverage of the Clinton scandal.

Figure 10: fsQCA parsimonious solution for coverage of the Clinton scandal.
The articles in the sample tended to focus on the egregiousness of Clinton’s actions. When the scandal first broke, the news media portrayed Lewinsky as young and vulnerable intern. They pointed out that had Clinton been a college president or a professor, a dalliance with a student or intern would surely have gotten him fired. However, the press was less inclined to portray Lewinsky as a victim once her sexual past came to light. A teacher from her high school revealed their five-year affair to the press,
and described her as “obsessed with sex.”\textsuperscript{10} Further, reporters also learned that Lewinsky had been the one to pursue Clinton. An article in the \textit{Washington Post} noted Lewinsky’s efforts to see Clinton, describing how “she would spend hundreds of dollars to buy a ticket to a presidential fund-raiser in order to station herself along the rope line for a chance to see, and be seen or hugged by, the president.”\textsuperscript{11} The press was also scandalized by the location of the affair – in the White House – not only the home he shared with his wife and daughter, but also one of the most venerated symbols of the nation.

The press did not consider sex to be the most egregious part of Clinton’s behavior, however. It was his dishonesty and cover-up that outraged journalists the most. Once Clinton revealed that he did, in fact, have sexual relations with Lewinsky, \textit{USA Today} demanded that Clinton resign, while the \textit{New York Times} recommended censure for his earlier deceit. All the outlets included in this study were in favor of Clinton being impeached. The \textit{Washington Post} was incredulous that Clinton had allowed others to defend him from accusations that he had partaken in an extramarital affair, when he had always known that they were true. In an editorial, the paper remarked, “For the last seven months, Clinton has let stand his denials of any sexual liaisons with Lewinsky and allowed aides and even his wife go on television to repeat them.”\textsuperscript{12} The \textit{New York Times} also marveled at Clinton’s dishonesty:

\begin{quote}
Until it was measured by Kenneth Starr, no citizen -- indeed, perhaps no member of his own family -- could have grasped the completeness of President Clinton's mendacity or the magnitude of his recklessness. Whatever the outcome of the resignation and impeachment debates, the independent counsel report by Mr. Starr is devastating in one respect, and its historic mark will be permanent. A President
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{10} Barnes, Robert 1998, February 1.  
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid  
\textsuperscript{12} Baker, Peter and John Harris 1998, August 18.
who had hoped to be remembered for the grandeur of his social legislation will
instead be remembered for the tawdriness of his tastes and conduct and for the
disrespect with which he treated a dwelling that is a revered symbol of
Presidential dignity.\textsuperscript{113}

The manner in which Clinton admitted his guilt did not help matters. Although he said in
his televised statement that he “regret[ed]” misleading people, including his wife, he did
not apologize for his actions. The four-minute speech focused mostly on attacking Starr
and the Independent Counsel. “I intend to reclaim my family life for my family. It's
nobody's business but ours. Even presidents have private lives. It is time to stop the
pursuit of personal destruction and the prying into private lives and get on with our
national life,” Clinton said in the speech.\textsuperscript{114} For outlets like the \textit{Washington Post}, “seven
months after he wagged his finger and sternly told a national audience that he did not
have sex with ‘that woman,’” the speech was not humble enough.\textsuperscript{115} In an editorial, the
\textit{New York Times} described Clinton’s apology as dismissive of public concerns:

\begin{quote}
The American President is a person who sometimes must ask people in the ranks
to die for the country. The President is a person who asks people close around him
to serve the government for less money than their talents would bring elsewhere.
The President sometimes requires that people out in the country sacrifice their
dollars or their convenience for national goals. All he is asked to provide in return
is trustworthiness, loyalty and judgment. These concentric circles of the national
family simply want the President to have enough character not to abuse their
devotion.

President Clinton has failed that simple test abjectly, not merely with undignified
private behavior in a revered place, but with his cavalier response to public
concern. That is why the cursory speech he made before departing on vacation
probably did him more harm than good.\textsuperscript{116}
\end{quote}

An editorial in \textit{USA Today} denounced it, as well:

\begin{quote}

\textsuperscript{114} Baker, Peter and John Harris 1998, August 18.
\textsuperscript{115} \textit{Ibid}.
\end{quote}
The drip, drip, drip of sordid details only prolonged his wife and daughter's suffering. The people's fervent pleas for a quick end to the sordid affair went unanswered...[His apology] bordered on insulting. After what everyone should now realize were seven months of stonewalling, lies and cover up, the address came across as little more than an attempt by Clinton to save his flailed skin.\footnote{USA Today Editorial Board 1998, August 18.}

Realizing that his statement had missed the mark, Clinton apologized for his affair a few weeks later at a White House prayer breakfast. This time, the press covered him more favorably. A Washington Post article set the scene:

> With tearing eyes and a trembling voice, President Clinton succeeded yesterday in convincing a room full of religious leaders that he was genuinely sorry about his affair with Monica S. Lewinsky and embarrassed about the way he handled it. One after another, ministers, rabbis and imams left the White House prayer breakfast saying they were moved by the sight of the most powerful man in the world humbling himself so thoroughly before them.

> Dozens of those who spoke afterward said they were confident that the speech marked a turning point on Clinton's road to personal salvation. Even many who had once been reluctant to forgive the president set aside any concerns they had about being used to provide moral cover and conveyed their approval.\footnote{Washington Post 1998, September 12.}

The New York Times also approved of the speech, remarking, “With its unmitigated confession, its declaration of repentance, its forthright apology to Ms. Lewinsky, this was a striking speech.”\footnote{New York Times Editorial Board 1998, September 12.}

Tawdry details were also noted in the articles, with a particular emphasis on oral sex. The newspapers tried to convey this information as tersely as possible. The Washington Post described how Lewinsky “gave Starr a dress she said was stained with the president’s semen.”\footnote{Baker, Peter and John Harris 1998, August 18.} The New York Times was coy, and only said that Lewinsky had “preserved a blue dress that provided evidence of their affair.”\footnote{Mitchell, Alison 1998, December 20.}

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\footnote{USA Today Editorial Board 1998, August 18.}
\footnote{Washington Post 1998, September 12.}
\footnote{New York Times Editorial Board 1998, September 12.}
\footnote{Baker, Peter and John Harris 1998, August 18.}
\footnote{Mitchell, Alison 1998, December 20.}
the debate of what constituted sex were also discussed; a piece in the *Washington Post* said:

Legal advisers to the president asserted that did not cover oral sex performed on Clinton, an interpretation disputed by the Jones lawyers and independent legal experts. Even if that were the case, however, Clinton faces possible trouble because Lewinsky testified that they engaged in mutual foreplay activity that would be covered by the definition, according to legal sources.\footnote{122}

Rodham Clinton was almost universally depicted throughout the articles as a supportive activist who was a key player in her husband’s defense. The *New York Times* described her as “Defender-in-Chief” in a headline.\footnote{123} When the scandal first broke, the *Washington Post* said, “Hillary Rodham Clinton has swung into "full battle mode" in defense of her husband.”\footnote{124} Months later, when she asked politicians to “end the divisiveness” as the House of Representatives deliberated impeachment, the *New York Times* noted that, “Today his enduring ally, Hillary Rodham Clinton, once more rallied to his side.”\footnote{125} The *New York Times* quoted a Democratic pollster, Geoffrey Garin, as arguing, “Her attitudes are a very important litmus test in this situation. If she has confidence in the President under these circumstances, a lot of people take it as a signal that they ought to feel confident as well.”\footnote{126} *USA Today* went even further with a statement from political scientist Allan Lichtman, who said, “The one person who could make Bill Clinton crumble is Hillary Clinton, not the independent counsel. If she were to falter, it would be the end of Bill Clinton.”\footnote{127} The articles also emphasized that Rodham Clinton did not want to be perceived as a victim. A piece in the *Washington Post* said,
“Those who know her best say the first lady would cringe if she thought the American people saw her as the pitiful wronged wife…friends say, Hillary Clinton is fiercely protective of the man she met at Yale law school -- and if she knows or suspects that he has been unfaithful, she would never let on. They also say she remains deeply in love.”

Given Rodham Clinton’s history of supporting Clinton throughout his multiple sexual indiscretions, reporters delved into her motivations for staying in the marriage. *USA Today* in particular focused on Rodham Clinton’s devotion to family. The outlet quoted Reverend Jackson as remarking, “Hillary was rather steadfast in her focus on preserving her family. She knows it's for better or worse. They've had better moments, but as partners they are winners.” In another piece, a reporter wrote, “Hillary Clinton made clear in her book, *It Takes A Village*, that she thinks family preservation is a top priority for any parent. Her mother was ‘a child of divorce’ sent to live with unsympathetic grandparents when she was 8. Her own wish, she writes, is that ‘every child have an intact, dependable family.’” The *Washington Post* published an extensively researched article focusing on the Clintons’ marriage, featuring interviews from their colleagues and friends. The piece said that while Rodham Clinton had briefly contemplated divorce in their often-tempestuous marriage, she “concluded that she had invested too much in her marriage and was determined to see it through.” Further, the article noted, the political partnership between Rodham Clinton and Clinton meant that their legacy and position were entwined. As it said, “Considering the nature of their relationship from the beginning, the patterns that developed in Arkansas, and the wall of conspiracy she has built around herself in the White House, the notion that she might

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128 Romano and Merida 1998, January 24
129 Hall and Lee 1998, August 18.
leave her husband in the midst of crisis seems almost beside the point. In essence, she would be leaving herself.”

Reporters also noted the seeming contradictions in Rodham Clinton’s personality: on one hand, she was a successful lawyer and feminist, but on the other, she supported her husband through infidelity. As an article in the New York Times put it:

After six years as a national figure, Mrs. Clinton remains a puzzle to her critics and her supporters, her public image shifting as swiftly as her hairstyle. She is an antiwar organizer who said she wanted to join the Marines. She is a Methodist Midwesterner who held imaginary conversations with Eleanor Roosevelt to enhance her self-awareness. She is a 50-year-old matron who strikes terror into the White House staff. She is a buttoned-up lawyer who sang show tunes on television with Rosie O'Donnell. And she is an ardent feminist who stands by her man.\textsuperscript{131}

\textit{USA Today} wondered, “Is she the feminist ideal or a doormat? Should she be admired for her self-confidence and ability to function under pressure? Criticized for selling herself short? Pitied as a victim of betrayal?”\textsuperscript{132} The public showed similar confusion; a poll by \textit{USA Today} found that 40 percent of respondents said Rodham Clinton was supportive because “she is committed to her marriage and loves her husband,” another 34 percent felt that it was because she “likes being first lady,” and 16 percent believed that it was because “she's committed to his policy goals.”\textsuperscript{133}

Clinton not only survived the scandal from a legal perspective, but also ended up winning the public’s support. Despite the news media’s focus on the egregiousness of Clinton’s behavior, Rodham Clinton’s outspoken defense of Clinton made it appear that there was little human cost to Clinton’s actions. As a \textit{USA Today} article pointed out, “Many Americans will take their cue from Hillary Rodham Clinton about how to view

\textsuperscript{131} Bennet 1998, January 25.  
\textsuperscript{132} Lawrence 1998, February 3.  
\textsuperscript{133} Hallin 1998, August 19.
the dramatic developments that had made her family's painful personal life so public. If she can deal with her husband's infidelity, the reasoning goes, why should it bother me?“134 Without a victim to rally around, it was difficult for the public to be outraged over Clinton’s consensual sexual encounters, particularly when the country was at peace and the economy was thriving. As J.R. Zaller points out, “the economy was the strongest in 25 years, the federal budget was on the verge of balance for the first time in 20 years, crime was falling for the first time in living memory, and the country was at peace.”135 Voters were more concerned with this “bottom line” than with Clinton’s private affair.

**Anthony Weiner**

Just as the media frenzy over Clinton-Lewinsky scandal was indicative of changing trends in journalism, the scandal over New York City Congressman Anthony Weiner’s sexual behavior less than a decade later highlighted the emergence of new social media technology. Ironically, Weiner had also risen to prominence in part because of new media. One of his impassioned speeches on the House floor, tearing down Republicans for voting against a bill that would have provided up to $7.4 billion in health care aid to 9/11 rescue and recovery workers in 2010, was posted on YouTube. The national news media described it as “epic” and a “must-see.”136 Although Weiner did not have a substantial policy record, his media presence helped him become a well-known politician nationally.

Weiner had become a hero for many Americans for his passionate defense of the 9/11 rescue and recovery workers, but that pinnacle proved to be short-lived. One year

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134 Ibid
135 Zaller 1997, p. 185
136 Pepper 2010, July 30.
later, Weiner used Twitter to publicly send a sexually suggestive picture to a female college student living in Seattle, Washington on May 27, 2011. He had meant to send the photo, of gray boxer briefs containing an erection, privately through the Direct Message feature, but instead accidentally posted it on his public profile. He deleted the tweet quickly, but not before someone took a screenshot and sent it to the conservative media website BigGovernment.com, which published the image online.\footnote{CNN Wire Staff 2011, June 7.} Weiner then tweeted that his Facebook had been hacked, suggesting that someone else had posted the photo as a joke because his last name was Weiner. On May 31, Weiner spoke to CNN and the Daily Caller, dismissing the photo as a “prank” and a “distraction.”\footnote{CNN Wire Staff 2011, May 31.} Later that day, though, when reporters asked him at a press conference if he had sent the photograph, he repeatedly evaded the question. On June 1, he gave three televised interviews with MSNBC and CNN where he reiterated that he did not send the photo, but that he couldn’t say “with certitude” whether or not the photo was of him.\footnote{Cilizza 2011, June 1.} On June 6, Andrew Breitbart, owner of BigGovernment.com, reported that he had been approached by a woman who claimed to have had an inappropriate online relationship with Weiner. He published their online exchanges, which included a shirtless photo sent by Weiner, on his website.\footnote{CNN Wire Staff 2011, June 7.}

Weiner then hastily called a press conference where he admitted that he had sent the tweet. He also confessed to conducting six online relationships with women over the past three years, some after his marriage to Huma Abedin, senior aide to Rodham Clinton, in 2010.\footnote{Ibid.} He said that the relationships had never been physical, and that despite feeling embarrassed, he would not resign. Abedin was not present at the press conference, and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[137] CNN Wire Staff 2011, June 7.
\item[138] CNN Wire Staff 2011, May 31.
\item[139] Cilizza 2011, June 1.
\item[140] CNN Wire Staff 2011, June 7.
\item[141] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Weiner said she had not known that he had lied about not sending the tweet until that morning.

The evening of the press conference, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi called for an Ethics Committee investigation to determine whether Weiner had used government resources for his online relationships.\textsuperscript{142} While Weiner denied this was the case, two women said in interviews that Weiner had called them from his government phone.\textsuperscript{143} The next day, TMZ broke the news that Weiner had told one of the women, porn star Ginger Lee, to lie about their relationship, and even offered her PR advice from his team.\textsuperscript{144}

Amidst the scandal, on June 8 the \textit{New York Times} reported that Abedin was pregnant with the couple’s first child. Her friends told the press that the pregnancy had complicated matters, making it more difficult for Abedin to walk away from the marriage.\textsuperscript{145} Three days later, Democratic National Committee Chair Debbie Wasserman Shultz and Pelosi called on Weiner to resign.\textsuperscript{146} Weiner maintained that he would stay in office, but asked for a temporary leave of absence from the House so that he could seek professional treatment.\textsuperscript{147} There was little sign of the scandal subsiding, though. Even President Obama discussed it in an interview on the \textit{Today Show}. “If it was me, I would resign. Because public service is exactly that: It’s a service to the public. And when you get to the point where, because of various personal distractions, you can’t serve as effectively as you need to…then you should probably step back,” he said.\textsuperscript{148}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{142} Bresnahan 2011, June 6.  
\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{144} TMZ Staff 2011, June 7.  
\textsuperscript{145} Barbaro and Parker 2011, June 8.  
\textsuperscript{146} CNN Wire Staff 2011, June 12.  
\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{148} James 2011, June 13.
\end{flushleft}
On June 15, Ginger Lee held a press conference with her lawyer, Gloria Allred, who read excerpts from the Twitter messages between Weiner and Lee.\textsuperscript{149} That seemed to be the last straw, as Weiner held a press conference the next day announcing his resignation from Congress. He apologized to his constituency and to his wife, who was not present, and emphasized the need to engage in a healing process:

I am here today to again apologize for the personal mistakes I have made and the embarrassment I have caused. I make this apology to my neighbors and my constituents but I make it particularly to my wife, Huma.

I had hoped to be able to continue the work that the citizens of my district elected me to do: to fight for the middle class and those struggling to make it.

Unfortunately, the distraction that I have created has made that impossible, so today I’m announcing my resignation from Congress, [cheers, shouts of “Yeah!”] so my colleagues can get back to work, my neighbors can choose a new representative and most importantly that my wife and I can continue to heal from the damage I have caused.\textsuperscript{150}

After lying low for a year, Weiner and Abedin gave an interview to People Magazine in July 2012, sharing an intimate family photograph with their son, Jordan.\textsuperscript{151} The article established Weiner as a family man. Leading with a description of Weiner shampooing his son’s hair in the sink, the piece described him as a “house husband.”\textsuperscript{152} Weiner told the magazine, “I really do

\textsuperscript{149} Koppel 2011, June 16.  
\textsuperscript{150} Newman and Parker 2011, June 16.  
\textsuperscript{151} Westfall 2012, July 30.  
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.
feel like a very, very different person.”

Abedin also vouched for him, declaring, “Anthony has spent every day since then trying to be the best dad and husband he can be.”

The article noted that reports that Weiner had approached his former aides about possibly running for mayor, but Weiner denied the story. “I can't say absolutely that I will never run for public office again, but I'm very happy in my present life. I'm not doing anything to plan a campaign. The only next dramatic steps I'm planning on are Jordan's first,” he said.

In April 2013, Weiner took another major step towards rehabilitation with a cover story in New York Times Magazine. The cover photo showed Weiner holding hands with Abedin, who looked glamorous in a black jacket and bold red lipstick. The headline read “Huma and Anthony: The Private Life of a Former Power Couple.” As in People, the article started out by establishing Weiner as a family man:

The first thing Weiner said when I sat down was that their 13-month-old son, Jordan, had just moments ago taken his first step. They were both giddy, yelling with baby-pride, especially Weiner, who, with all his free time, has become his son’s primary caretaker…He seems to spend much of his time within a five-block radius of his apartment: going to the park with Jordan; picking up his wife’s dry cleaning and doing the grocery shopping; eating at his brother Jason’s two restaurants in the neighborhood.

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153 Ibid.
154 Ibid.
155 Ibid.
156 Van Meter 2013, April 10.
In their interviews for the piece, Weiner and Abedin shared the pain that he had caused to their marriage. Weiner said, “It was brutal. It was completely out of control. There was the crime, there was the cover-up, there was harm I had done to her. And there’s no one who deserved this less than Huma. That’s really the bottom line. No one deserved to have a dope like me do that less than she did.” He got emotional as he noted how grateful he was for Abedin giving him a second chance. The reporter noted that Weiner began to cry as he promised to try to “make sure to get it right.”

Abedin said the decision to forgive Weiner had been difficult, but the right choice for her. She told the magazine:

There was a deep love there, but it was coupled with a tremendous feeling of betrayal. It took a lot of work, both mentally and in the way we engage with each other, for me to get to a place where I said: ‘O.K., I’m in. I’m staying in this marriage.’ Here was a man I respected, I loved, was the father of this child inside of me, and he was asking me for a second chance. And I’m not going to say that was an easy or fast decision that I made. It’s been almost two years now. I did spend a lot of time saying and thinking: ‘I. Don’t. Understand.’ And it took a long time to be able to sit on a couch next to Anthony and say, ‘O.K., I understand and I forgive.’ It was the right choice for me. I didn’t make it lightly.

Weiner also came across as thoughtful and introspective in the interview. He said he had been drawn to his online conversations as “just another way to feed this notion that I want to be liked and admired.” He explained:

By definition, when you are a politician, you want people to like you, you want people to respond to what you’re doing, you want to learn what they want to hear so you can say it to them…And there just wasn’t much of me who was smart enough, sensitive enough, in touch with my own things, understanding enough about the disrespect and how dishonorable it was to be doing that.

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157 Ibid  
158 Ibid  
159 Ibid
His response to the scandal had been just as insensitive, he noted. “The fact that I was an idiot about it; the fact that, while I was still lying about it, I dug myself in deeper by getting beefy with every reporter,” he said.160

The piece portrayed Weiner as someone who had grown from the scandal. The reporter wrote, “His family agrees that the post-scandal Weiner, the diaper-changing Weiner, is far more likable.”161 Weiner’s sister-in-law, Almond Zigmund, suggested that the Weiners in general were emotionally repressed, particularly since the death of their brother. “When you suppress something, it eventually starts to come out in weird ways. You look for outlets, and maybe it comes out distorted and sideways,” she said.162 His brother even said that the scandal “could make him a better politician.”163

The article ended on a note of redemption, suggesting that Weiner might run for mayor. “I want to ask people to give me a second chance. I do want to have that conversation with people whom I let down and with people who put their faith in me and who wanted to support me. I think to some degree I do want to say to them, ‘Give me another chance,’” said Weiner.164

Even as Weiner played coy about his intentions for running in the mayoral race, the media started to portray him as a potentially serious contender. Reporters pointed out that Weiner had $4.3 million to use in campaign funds (amassed before the scandal), plus another $1.5 million in public matching funds.165 A poll commissioned by NBC News/Marist College in April found him coming in second place after Christine Quinn,

160 Ibid.
161 Ibid.
162 Ibid.
163 Ibid.
164 Ibid.
165 Harper 2013, April 10.
capturing the support of 16 percent of registered Democrats to Quinn’s 26 percent.\textsuperscript{166} It appeared that Weiner might actually have a shot at winning the primary.

On May 22, Weiner announced his campaign for mayor of New York City through a two-minute video posted on YouTube. From the start, his campaign centered on the theme of redemption. In the video, he said, “Look, I’ve made some big mistakes and I know I’ve let a lot of people down. But I’ve also learned some tough lessons. I’m running for mayor because I’ve been fighting for the middle class and those struggling to make it for my entire life. And I hope I get a second chance to work for you.”\textsuperscript{167} Abedin also appeared in the video, arguing that, “We love this city, and no one will work harder to make it better than Anthony.”\textsuperscript{168} About a month after his announcement, Weiner had established himself as a frontrunner in the Democratic mayoral primary, coming first in a \textit{Wall Street Journal} – NBC New York – Marist poll, leading Quinn 25 percent to 20 percent.\textsuperscript{169} Abedin made numerous appearances with Weiner on the campaign trail, and also heavily fundraised for him through her connections with the Clintons.

Weiner’s good fortune did not last long. On July 22, the gossip website \textit{The Dirty} published a Facebook chat conversation between Weiner and a woman whose identity was withheld, which had purportedly occurred after he had resigned from Congress.\textsuperscript{170} The article revealed that Weiner had a six-month virtual relationship – involving phone sex – with the woman. In the screenshot of the conversation posted on the website, Weiner asks the woman to “hard-delete” their correspondence as a precaution after the \textit{New York Times Magazine} piece was published. The article also revealed the pseudonym

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{166} Moore 2013, April 16. \\
\textsuperscript{167} Katz 2013, May 22. \\
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid \\
\textsuperscript{169} Katz 2013, June 25. \\
\textsuperscript{170} Smith 2013, July 23.
\end{verbatim}
\end{footnotesize}
Weiner had used for the online accounts associated with the dirty correspondence, “Carlos Danger.” The story began to go viral once Buzzfeed posted an article linking to the piece on *The Dirty*.\(^{171}\)

One day later, on July 23, Weiner called a press conference. With Abedin by his side, he admitted to having sent sexual messages to women after he had resigned from Congress. He apologized for his actions, but argued that the timeline was not important, because now the behavior was truly behind him.\(^{172}\) Then he introduced his “amazing wife,” Abedin, who gave her own statement [emphasis mine]:

As many of you who have followed this campaign know, I’ve spent a good deal [of time] on the campaign trail. Going to churches and street fairs, parades. **But this is the first time I’ve spoken at a press conference, and you'll have to bear with me, because I’m very nervous, and I wrote down what I wanted to say.** When we faced this publicly two years ago, it was the beginning of a time in our marriage -- it was very difficult, and it took us a very long time to get through it. **Our marriage, like many others, has had its ups and its downs. It took a lot of work -- and a whole lot of therapy -- to get to a place where I could forgive Anthony.**

It was not an easy choice in any way. But I made the decision that it was worth staying in this marriage. That was a decision I made for me, for our son, and for our family. I didn’t know how it would work out, but I did know that I wanted to give it a try.

**Anthony's made some horrible mistakes, both before he resigned from Congress and after. But I do very strongly believe that that is between us and our marriage. We discussed all of this before Anthony decided he would run for mayor.**

**So really what I want to say is: I love him, I have forgiven him, I believe in him, and as we have said from the beginning, we are moving forward.** Thank you very much. Thank you for your time.\(^{173}\)

Weiner didn’t answer questions at the press conference, but the next day, he appeared at a soup kitchen where reporters clamored for more information about his relationships.

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\(^{171}\) *Ibid*

\(^{172}\) Chen and Hernandez (2013, July 23).

\(^{173}\) Katz (2013, July 23).
Weiner admitted that he had engaged in inappropriate relationships with 6-10 women online, including three after he had resigned.\footnote{Kim 2013, July 25.}

While Weiner remained in the race until he lost in the primary, any chances he had of winning the election were effectively over with round two of the scandal. Weiner tried to continue as a serious candidate, but the media wouldn’t let him live the scandal down. When Weiner released more policy ideas, the \textit{New York Daily News} ran an article titled, “TRYING HARDER: Weiner touts wonk ideas 61 not-so-sexy positions.”\footnote{Durkin and Fermino 2013, August 6.} An August 12 article in the \textit{Daily News} on Weiner’s appearance at the Dominican Day parade was headlined, “HIS SEXT A-PEEL: Weiner wields big fruit, puts on show at parade.”\footnote{Durkin 2013, August 11.} Further, the scandal continued to grow as one of the women he corresponded with, Sydney Leathers, revealed her identity as the tipster to \textit{The Dirty} and continued to expose the communications between them. Outlets like the \textit{New York Post} published the explicit text messages that the two had sent to each other.\footnote{Campanile 2013, July 24.}

Political figures called on Weiner to leave the race. House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi denounced his actions as “reprehensible” and “disrespectful to women.”\footnote{Parkinson 2013, July 25.} Other candidates in the Democratic primary, like Bill de Blasio and Christine Quinn, also said that Weiner should drop out of the race. “The sideshows of this election have gotten in the way of the debate we should be having about the future of this city. And yes, I’m talking about Anthony Weiner. Enough is enough. I’m calling on Anthony to withdraw
from this race — for the good of the city that I know he loves as much as all of us,” said de Blasio.\(^\text{179}\)

The public became similarly disenchanted with Weiner. After his revelatory press conference, Weiner slipped in the polls to fourth place, dropping 10 points from the last Quinnipiac poll.\(^\text{180}\) Polls also showed that New Yorkers found him embarrassing and wanted him to leave the race, viewing him even more harshly than they did their former governor Eliot Spitzer, who had resigned amidst a prostitution scandal in 2008, and was now running for comptroller. A Siena College poll found that Weiner had a record-setting negative approval rating of 80 percent amongst voters, compared to Spitzer’s disapproval rating of 59 percent.\(^\text{181}\) Weiner also had a difficult time fundraising.\(^\text{182}\) While he had raised an average of $16,434 a day in the first 50 days of his campaign, that number decreased to $1,897 a day in the two weeks following the scandal. Abedin, who had raised $150,000 for Weiner before, didn’t raise anything after the scandal. Ultimately, Weiner took fifth place in the primary, winning 4.9 percent of the vote.\(^\text{183}\)

Thirty articles were selected from the *New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today*, and *Wall Street Journal*, along with the state newspapers the *New York Post* and *New York Daily News*, starting from the time that Weiner held his press conference admitting that his online relationships had continued after his resignation from Congress to the date of the primary (July 23 to September 10, 2013). I used all the articles from these outlets that met the criteria outlined in the methods chapter. According to the fsQCA results below, the parsimonious solution identifies a lack of focus on

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\(\text{179}\) Trianni and Honan 2013, July 23.  
\(\text{180}\) Walker 2013, July 29.  
\(\text{181}\) DeFalco 2013, August 13.  
\(\text{182}\) Katz, Fermino and Karni 2013, August 10.  
\(\text{183}\) Palmeri and Saul 2013, September 11.
egregiousness and the portrayal of the wife as an activist as the causal conditions for non-negative coverage. The intermediate solution shows that a lack of focus on egregiousness and salaciousness, along with a representation of the wife as an activist, and a lack of representation of her as a victim, are consistent with non-negative coverage. Since none of the articles focused on job performance or portrayed Abedin as an unsupportive activist, those factors were disregarded in the analysis. As with Clinton, there was little reason for an article to be negative towards Weiner if it did not focus on the appalling nature of his actions, or consider his wife to be a victim of his behavior.

Figure 14: fsQCA truth table for coverage of the Weiner scandal.
Figure 15: fsQCA complex solution for coverage of the Weiner scandal.

Figure 16: fsQCA parsimonious solution for coverage of the Weiner scandal.
Figure 17: fsQCA intermediate solution for coverage of the Weiner scandal.

The coverage was overwhelmingly negative. Editorials in the local newspapers included in the sample – the New York Times, the New York Post, and the New York Daily News – all called on Weiner to drop out of the race. The New York Times said, in part, “The serially evasive Mr. Weiner should take his marital troubles and personal compulsions out of the public eye, away from cameras, off the Web and out of the race for mayor of New York City.”\textsuperscript{184} The Daily News took a similar tone, saying, “He is not

\textsuperscript{184} New York Times Editorial Board 2013, July 23.
fit to lead America’s premier city. Lacking the dignity and discipline that New York deserves in a mayor, Weiner must recognize that his demons have no place in City Hall.”185

The magnitude of the backlash against Weiner might seem puzzling, as he never actually had physical relationships with any of the women. However, while Weiner’s actions might not have been as morally reprehensible as other politicians’, they deviated starkly from the sexual norm. Indeed, it might have been more understandable for the public and the media if Weiner had engaged in a more “typical” affair, where he had a physical relationship with a mistress. Weiner’s penchant for sending photographs of his genitalia, however, appeared to be perverted. USA Today described him as “bizarrely disturbed.”186 He was called “pathological” in an article in the New York Post, and outlets – even more prestigious ones like the New York Times and Washington Post – ran pieces speculating whether Weiner had a mental illness.187 The Daily News opined, “Mayor Bloomberg takes Spanish lessons in his spare time. If he’s elected mayor, Anthony Weiner will have to use some of his to get psychotherapy.”188 As the New York Times Magazine profile had noted, there had been fallback in round one of the scandal because, “It was a sex scandal without any actual sex — more creepy than anything else. But it was hard for people to get their heads around: an affair is one thing, but sending crotch pictures to a virtual stranger?”189 That Weiner continued this behavior sealed the belief that there was something wrong with him.

186 USA Today Editorial Board 2013, July 25.
187 Taylor and Hernandez 2013, July 29.
188 Fermino 2013, July 25.
189 Van Meter 2013, April 10.
Not only did Weiner’s behavior cause him to lose the respect of the news media, but it also caused them to question whether someone with those tendencies would be a good fit for public office. Unlike with the Clinton scandal, where the public differentiated between Clinton’s private failings and his capacity to lead, Weiner’s behavior seemed to reflect that he would govern poorly. An editorial in *USA Today* said:

Weiner is by all accounts bright, talented and ambitious, but the demons haunting his psyche drive more than just his disturbing sexual deviancy. Someone with impulse control as weak as his should not be in a position of responsibility. Nor should someone so indifferent to the consequences of his actions. Nor a compulsive liar. Nor a digital flasher prone to behavior unacceptable even for teenagers.\(^{190}\)

The press also found it egregious that Weiner had repeated actions that had forced him out of office. Despite his plea for redemption, it was clear that Weiner had not learned his lesson. Articles pointed out that he had been carrying on his relationship with Leathers while promising to be a devoted family man and “a very different person” in the *People* profile. As Weiner started being combative with reporters, it seemed like a repeat of his behavior in round one of the scandal. It appeared that the self-awareness and sensitivity that had come across in the *New York Times Magazine* interview had all been a facade. As a piece in the *New York Times* noted:

The revelation [of the scandal] collides with the narrative Mr. Weiner has offered throughout the campaign, in which he has repeatedly suggested that he has spent his time since leaving Congress rehabilitating himself and repairing his family relationships. After a late entry into the Democratic primary he had rapidly risen in the polls, and performed strongly in fund-raising as his relentless focus on ideas and his omnipresence helped ease the concerns of many voters.\(^{191}\)

Weiner had once seemed like proof that redemption was possible; he now appeared to be a liar and a hypocrite with some deep-rooted problems.

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\(^{190}\) USA Today Editorial Board 2013, July 25.

\(^{191}\) Chen and Hernandez 2013, July 23.
The salacious details of the text messages he had sent Leathers didn’t help matters, either. Weiner could not be taken seriously after the media, and the public, learned of his sexual fantasies. Round two of the scandal also pushed forward memories of round one, and outlets republished messages from 2011, including a photo of Weiner’s genitalia.

With her outspoken public support of Weiner’s campaign, Abedin, a normally press-shy figure, also became the focus of widespread media coverage in the scandal. In fact, the New York Post cover the day after the press conference did not focus on Weiner, but showed a photo of Abedin, with the headline: “Señora Danger, What’s Wrong With You?”

Even if Abedin hadn’t appeared at the press conference, she likely would have drawn coverage anyway as one of the more high-profile wives included in this study. Abedin has long been the object of media fascination, serving as aide to Rodham Clinton when she was First Lady, body woman when she was running as President, and then Deputy Chief of Staff when Clinton was Secretary of State. Clinton has frequently referred to Abedin as her “second daughter,” and described her essential to her team.¹⁹² The media interest did not just stem from her connections with the Clintons, however, but also her status as a glamour and beauty icon. In fact, Vogue profiled her in an issue when Clinton

¹⁹² Henderson 2011, June 7.
was running for President. Her marriage to Weiner, another political figure, had also made headlines. President Bill Clinton’s role as officiator also considerably added to the news value of their wedding, as well as the fact that they were an interracial and interreligious couple (Weiner is Jewish, while Abedin is a Pakistani-Indian Muslim).

Abedin was featured in *Vogue* again in 2010 for her wedding. Her wedding dress designer, Oscar de la Renta said, “She is an unbelievably feminine and gentle person, but at the same time she can accomplish so much.”

Her role in the campaign, though, intensified the media’s focus, allowing them to cover her more extensively. There were widely divergent characterizations of Abedin throughout the outlets, sometimes even within the same outlet. Of the 15 articles in the sample that mentioned Abedin, 10 portrayed her as an activist and 5 as a victim, but many did not lean entirely in one direction or another either, portraying her as a mix of both roles. None of the articles approved of decision to support Weiner, but they offered different explanations for why this might be the case, some more sympathetic to Abedin than others. The *New York Post* also ran an article called “It’s Huma Nature: I Blame Myself,” which claimed that Abedin was staying with Weiner for her son. The piece featured a comment from a friend, saying, “She never wanted Jordan to say to her, ‘Why didn’t you do everything you could to help Dad?’” It also claimed that Abedin “was kicking herself at the time for bailing out of couples counseling and focusing more on their newborn baby boy,” believing that had led to Weiner continuing his online relationships. An editorial in *USA Today* was convinced that Weiner had pressured

193 Johnson 2007, August.
194 Katz, Deutsch and Schapiro 2010, July 11.
195 James 2011, June 7.
196 Goldenberg, Sally 2013, August 1.
Abedin to speak at his press conference, wondering, “what sort of man would expose someone he loves to such public shame and ridicule to further his own ambition?”

Others, however, cast her as a Lady Macbeth-type character. Many pieces argued that Abedin was ambitious, and wanted to be First Lady of New York at any cost. They drew unflattering parallels to her boss, Rodham Clinton, whom they also painted as ruthless and scheming. The New York Post ran a piece that said:

Abedin took the good-wife act one step further at Tuesday’s press conference, admitting her collusion in this new lie: ‘We discussed all of this before Anthony decided to run for mayor,’ she said. So clearly, as Abedin sat for these joint interviews in which Weiner claimed to be a changed man, she knew that wasn’t the truth, and was happy to lie to a public that had been nothing but sympathetic toward poor, brilliant Huma, saddled with such a dud. Perhaps they’re a better match than we knew.

Reports that Abedin had been “cashing in” on her Clinton connections, pressuring friends of the Clintons to donate to the Weiner campaign, also made her appear to be self-seeking. Sources had divulged to the Washington Post that they had felt pressured to donate to Weiner by Abedin, as they said, “People like Huma, but they saw her trading on the Hillary card and resented it. But that didn’t mean they didn’t show up…the chatter was, if you wanted to stay in Hillary’s good graces, you answer the call from Huma.”

Journalists likely disagreed on their assessment of Abedin because she could not be easily characterized. While she was clearly an ambitious and accomplished woman, her colleagues and friends, like de la Renta, had gone on record to discuss her kindness. This made it difficult for some to accept that she had supported Weiner just out of ruthless ambition. Further, her status as a beauty and style icon also made people sympathetic to her. The Daily News even ran an article on her hair at the press

197 USA Today Editorial Board 2013, July 25.
198 Callahan, Maureen 2013, July 25.
199 Tumulty, Karen and Jason Horowitz 2013, July 24.
conference, headlined, “Huma Abedin's rich, glowing hair draws looks of envy from many women, scandal or not.”

Abedin is the only wife in this study that became high-profile in her own right – i.e., not because of who she was married to, but because of her own career. She is unusual amongst the cases in that she also continued her career after marriage, and kept her last name as well. In many ways, Abedin represented the modern woman – young, glamorous, and successful. The press was perplexed as to why someone who seemed as independent as Abedin would stand by a man who had humiliated her not once, but twice, in front of the public. Even feminist activist Gloria Steinem weighed in, telling the New York Times, “I have no way of knowing whether Huma, for whom I have great respect, is responding out of new motherhood, the Stockholm syndrome or a mystery.”

Her own performance at the press conference only complicated matters. Even though Abedin spoke in support of her husband at the press conference, she appeared to be nervous, and admitted that was the case as well. She read from prepared remarks, adding to the perception of some journalists that she was anxious. The New York Times noted that she “spoke haltingly…reading from a prepared text that she slowly unfolded at the lectern.” The New York Post pitied her, stating, “Huma Abedin awkwardly joined horndog husband Anthony Weiner yesterday as he brushed off his attest sexting scandal – and then she stepped forward to bare her soul.” The Wall Street Journal wrote in an editorial that Weiner should end his run “simply because of what he’s forced his wife to endure. Watching the elegant Huma Abedin stand next to her man Tuesday as he explained his latest sexually charged online exchanges was painful for a normal human

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200 Grynbaum and Taylor 2013, July 24.
201 Chen and Hernandez 2013, July 23.
being to watch.” Yet a piece in the Washington Post said that Abedin “nodded supportively and spoke confidently.” Another article in the Washington Post also said that Abedin had “made a public transformation from being the victim of Anthony Weiner’s transgressions to a full partner in his ambition…she seized the moment at his news conference Tuesday, rejecting humiliation for defiance.”

Given that the press was almost unanimous in its negative portrayal of Weiner, it did not approve of Abedin’s decision to support him publicly, either. As a New York Times op-ed pointed out (that was not included in the sample), while Abedin might love Weiner, “that doesn’t mean that you ask people to vote for someone who’s dreadfully flawed for a major office.” Reporters were also bewildered that Weiner would even run – and why Abedin would support him – when they knew that embarrassing information might leak to the press. An editorial in the New York Times argued:

It’s difficult not to feel for Ms. Abedin. The couple deserved privacy as they worked through their problems – and they had it, until they re-emerged in public life and Mr. Weiner decided he was a good fit to run New York City. Mr. Weiner and Ms. Abedin have been saying that his sexual behavior is not the public’s business. Well, it isn’t, until they make it our business by plunging into a political campaign.

Abedin’s status as the only non-white woman in this study must also be noted, especially since her heritage did become a topic of discussion. As journalists wondered why she was staying with Weiner, some felt the only logical answer had to be her Muslim upbringing. Maureen Dowd of the New York Times wrote a column stating that Abedin was sticking by Weiner because she was used to worse treatment from where she

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204 Horowitz 2013, July 24.
205 Tumulty and Horowitz 2013, July 24.
206 Dowd, Maureen 2013, July 28.
was brought up, in Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{208} The piece generated considerable controversy, as many readers believed that the column was both racist and inaccurate, since Abedin spent most of her life in the US and the UK (not to mention that many white wives of straying politicians have also stayed in their marriages).

Abedin’s support clearly helped Weiner in the beginning of the election, before the second round of the scandal had begun. Not only did she help him raise substantially, she helped establish him as a reformed and devoted family man by giving lengthy interviews in \textit{People} and \textit{New York Times Magazine}, vouching for his character. Her campaign appearances also added to the perception that Weiner had atoned for his mistakes and was now a viable candidate for mayor. As the \textit{New York Times} argued, Weiner had to sell a redemption narrative in order to successfully run for mayor, and this was where Abedin became “his crucial character witness, a glamorous and widely admired figure who reassured New Yorkers.”\textsuperscript{209}

Yet spousal support can only take one so far, particularly when the mistakes have been repeated again. Weiner appeared to be such a liar that his wife’s support either seemed like a political ploy for her own gain or that she was entirely delusional. Weiner also appeared to have a pathological problem that would detrimentally impact his job performance were he to be elected mayor. There were other choices available, and anyone other than Weiner seemed more competent, no matter how much Abedin said that Weiner was the best pick. In other words, a wife’s support for her philandering husband is only worth something when the politician seems redeemable or salvageable. Abedin

\textsuperscript{208} Dowd 2013, July 28.
\textsuperscript{209} Grynbaum and Taylor 2013, July 24.
had helped convince the public and the media to give Weiner a second chance; he was not about to get another.

**Clinton and Weiner**

The similarities between the Clinton and Weiner scandals are striking. Both Clinton and Weiner were evasive and dishonest at first about their indiscretions, which made their scandals even more egregious for the news media. The nature of their relationships was also atypical in the realm of political sex scandals. Clinton had not engaged in penetrative sex with Lewinsky, a fact Clinton used unsuccessfully to argue that he had not actually had sex with Lewinsky. Weiner, on the other hand, had never even met the women he corresponded with. Both men are married to high-profile political figures that publicly supported them throughout the scandals. The strongest connection that can be made between the two is that Abedin works for Rodham Clinton. In fact, outlets also reported that the Clintons were unhappy with the unfavorable comparisons between Weiner and Clinton.

Both the Clinton and Weiner cases received extensive media coverage, but the tone was less supportive of Weiner than Clinton. Just over half of the coverage in the sample for Clinton was negative. This is consistent with Zaller’s observation that while press coverage of Clinton was negative in the first two days of the scandal, it then became more “fairly balanced.” However, Weiner received negative coverage in 83 percent of the sampled articles. Just as Clinton received less negative press coverage than Weiner, he also had greater support from the public, as seen by public approval ratings cited earlier in this chapter, while Weiner had alienated the public almost entirely. The

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210 Dagnes 2011 p. 249.
disparity stems from three main factors: (1) due to the high nature of the office of the Presidency, removing a President is more consequential, (2) the public might be more inclined to overlook the scandalous behavior of a politician already in office, so that he can finish his term (especially if his policies are favorable), as opposed to someone who is running for office, along with other qualified candidates – in one case, the choice has already been made, and in the other, there are still many other choices, and (3) the sexual behavior is seen as a private affair and one that does not reflect on the capabilities of the politician to hold office.

The first factor explains how Clinton redeemed himself far more successfully than Weiner, despite facing more extensive legal difficulties. Given the enormous responsibilities of the President, and the instability that can occur if he is removed from office, the charges that distract him from work or prevent him from serving his full term must be weighty. The public largely thought of Clinton’s extramarital affair as a private matter, and one that did not merit impeachment or intense media scrutiny. Given that legal action and extensive media coverage transpired anyway, there was a rally effect that resulted in greater public support for Clinton.

Not only is the office of mayor on a much smaller scale than the presidency, but also, as factor two points out, Weiner wasn’t even serving in the position; he was just running for it. There was no need for the public to tolerate his behavior, when they could easily vote for another candidate that wasn’t burdened by Weiner’s issues. Weiner’s behavior also seemed to reflect on his abilities as a politician, as discussed in factor three. His actions were seen as pathological, reckless, and narcissistic, completely
overwhelming any positive qualities he had. Reporters understood Clinton’s physical relationship much better than Weiner’s online dalliances.

Given the close ties between the Clintons and Abedin, many journalists argued that Abedin was unsuccessfully taking a page out of the “Clinton playbook” in an effort to rehabilitate Weiner’s image and help him win the race.\(^{211}\) They argued that these attempts failed because Weiner was not an accomplished politician like Clinton. As the New York Times pointed out, “The difference [between Weiner and Clinton] is, there’s nothing in Weiner’s public life that is redeeming. In 12 years in Congress, he managed to get only one minor bill passed, on behalf of a donor, and he doesn’t work well with people.”\(^{212}\) Further, Abedin’s friends (although it appears that they actually might have been friends of the Clintons) stated to the Times, “Bill Clinton was the greatest political and policy mind of a generation. Anthony is behaving similarly without the chops or résumé.”\(^{213}\) In other words, Clinton was worth saving, while Weiner was not.

Further, Clinton’s scandal had occurred while he was in office, and Rodham Clinton’s support was helping him finish his presidency. Keeping Clinton in office would not only allow him to continue developing his policies – ones that she supported and that were favored by the public, given his high approval ratings – but also avoid any potential instability that resignation or removal might create. While Rodham Clinton’s reasons for wanting to defend Clinton might have been personal, they were arguably in the public service as well. There was no compelling reason for Weiner, on the other hand, to run for office in the face of a scandal. Abedin’s support, then, seemed less in the public interest and more in the best interests of her family.

\(^{211}\) Gold 2013, July 24.
\(^{212}\) Dowd 2013, July 28.
\(^{213}\) Ibid
Further, Rodham Clinton was most outspoken in her support of Clinton when the accusations were still being denied, while Abedin gave her statement with the acknowledgement that her husband had continued his sexual misbehavior. Rodham Clinton was defending her husband’s honor; Abedin was asking the public to ignore her husband’s lack of it. While Rodham Clinton continued to help Clinton even after he admitted to the affair, her work was done largely behind the scenes. There can be something off-putting about seeing a spouse support a partner immediately after he has admitted infidelity. It can lead to questions of what is “wrong” with the spouse, or what is motivating her to stay with someone who has mistreated her. Rodham Clinton made it clear that while she was supporting Clinton in finishing his presidency, she was privately angrily with him. A USA Today article noted the “awkward” tension between Clinton and Rodham Clinton as they left for a vacation to Martha’s Vineyard the day after Clinton admitted his guilt, describing how “the couple didn't speak to each other on the way out to the helicopter or later, when they stepped off their plane on Martha's Vineyard.”

Coverage of the Clinton scandal rarely portrayed Rodham as a victim (of the articles that mentioned Clinton, 18 percent portrayed her as a victim), and was more understanding as to why she did not leave Clinton. For one, they had been married much longer, some outlets, like USA Today speculated that Rodham Clinton just felt too invested in the relationship to walk away. Further, Rodham Clinton’s legacy was also entwined with Clinton’s, as she had advised him on policy from when he had served as Governor of Arkansas to becoming President of the Untied States. Their deep political

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partnership provided another reason for why she continued to support him, at least on a public level. As the *Washington Post* noted:

The first key to understanding Hillary's behavior today can be found in the original nature of her relationship with Bill Clinton. From the time they began dating at Yale Law School in 1970, they shared a passion for politics, policy, power, books, ideas -- and they realized, they told friends, that they could attain heights together that they might not reach separately.\(^\text{216}\)

Even as the articles in this study might have questioned Clinton’s behavior, they did not belittle Rodham Clinton’s decision to support him in spite of it.

In Abedin’s case, though, even the articles that were more favorable could not fathom why she was supporting Weiner. While some reporters argued that perhaps Abedin supported Weiner out of love for him and her child, they wondered why she had encouraged him to run, knowing that he had continued his online sexual exchanges even after resigning from Congress. Surely, another round of scandal was not in the best interests of her husband or her son.\(^\text{217}\) Further, while the articles expressed sympathy for Clinton, they seemed to feel more pity for Abedin (of the sampled articles that mentioned Abedin, 33 percent portrayed her as a victim). Abedin was also less likely to be portrayed as an activist than Rodham Clinton (with 66 percent of the sampled coverage that mentioned Abedin describing her as an activist, compared to 82 percent in the case of Rodham Clinton). Her nervousness at the press conference likely made some reporters feel sorry for her.

While Rodham Clinton was less likely than Abedin to be portrayed as a victim and more likely to be portrayed as an activist, both Rodham Clinton and Abedin were more likely to be portrayed as an activist than a victim. The greater support for both

\(^{216}\) Maraniss 1998, February 1.

\(^{217}\) Marcus 2013, July 24.
Clinton and Rodham Clinton, opposed to Abedin and Weiner, seems to largely boil down to the difference in Clinton and Weiner’s capabilities. Rodham Clinton’s support for a popular politician made sense, in spite of his sexual misbehavior. The press was incredulous, though, that Abedin could claim that Weiner would make a good mayor. These cases illustrate that for spousal support to work in rehabilitating a politician caught in the middle of a sex scandal, the politician must be worth saving in the first place.
CLINTON-LEWINSKY SCANDAL TIMELINE

September 1997
Linda Tripp starts taping her telephone conversations with her colleague, Monica Lewinsky, who tells her of her affair with President Clinton

December 17, 1997
Lewinsky is subpoenaed by lawyers for Paula Jones, who has brought a lawsuit against Clinton for sexual harassment

January 7, 1998
Lewinsky denies an affair with Clinton in a sworn affidavit in the Paula Jones case

January 12, 1998
After hearing of Lewinsky’s denial in the affidavit, Tripp contacts Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr’s office, and sends the taped conversations where Lewinsky reveals details of the affair

January 16, 1998
US Attorney General Janet Reno approves Starr’s request for an expansion of the Whitewater investigation to include the Clinton-Lewinsky affair

January 17, 1998
In a testimony to lawyers in the Jones case, Clinton denies any sexual relationship with Lewinsky.

January 17, 1998
The Drudge Report breaks the story that Clinton is being investigated for a possible affair with Lewinsky

January 26, 1998
Clinton denies the charges in a nationally televised address

July 28, 1998
Lewinsky’s lawyers strike an immunity deal with Starr, where Lewinsky will receive transactional immunity for testifying about her relationship with Clinton

July 29, 1998
After Lewinsky hands over a blue test allegedly stained with Clinton’s semen to the prosecutors, Clinton decides to testify voluntarily

August 17, 1998
Clinton admits “inappropriate intimate contact” with Lewinsky in front of a grand jury and then in a nationally televised address to the public, but denies having told Lewinsky to lie about the affair

September 9, 1998
Starr releases his report to Congress, which contains 11 possible grounds for impeachment

October 5, 1998
The House Judiciary Committee votes to launch a congressional impeachment inquiry against Clinton

December 11, 1998
The House Judiciary Committee approves three articles of impeachment and passes them to the House of Representatives. The three articles accuse Clinton of lying to a grand jury, committing perjury by denying he had sexual relations with Lewinsky, and obstructing justice

December 19, 1998
Clinton is impeached by the House

February 12, 1999
Clinton is acquitted by the Senate
Eliot Spitzer and David Vitter

Both former Governor Eliot Spitzer and Senator David Vitter were exposed as the clients of high-end prostitution rings taken down by federal prosecutors. Their extramarital dalliances violated both traditional values and the law. Spitzer and Vitter immediately admitted wrongdoing, and their wives publicly supported them. Yet the outcomes were very different: while Spitzer resigned amidst overwhelmingly negative media coverage, and failed to rebound politically after that, Vitter survived, and is now considered to be a promising candidate in his campaign for governor.218 Why was the press so harsh on Spitzer, but more accepting of Vitter?

Eliot Spitzer

Before running for Governor in 2006, Spitzer had earned a reputation for being self-righteous from his work as Attorney General. The news media referred to him as the “Sheriff of Wall Street” for his relentless prosecution of white-collar crime and securities fraud, as he received national attention for his focus on high-profile cases involving corporations like Merrill Lynch and AIG. He capitalized on his “Mr. Clean” reputation during his campaign for governor, promising to clean up corruption in Albany, and won in November 2006.

Spitzer’s first year as governor was marred with difficulty, as he received low approval ratings from the public for being a “flip-flopper,” amidst complaints by his colleagues that he was “intemperate” and hard to work with.219 The media charged him with “flip-flopping” for pursuing controversial policies, such as issuing an executive order that required state offices to allow undocumented immigrants to be issued driver’s

licenses, and then rescinding support once polls revealed that they were unpopular.\textsuperscript{220} By November 2007, his approval ratings had fallen to 33 percent, an 11 percent decrease from just a month earlier.\textsuperscript{221}

If 2007 was a bad year, then 2008 was even worse, when he became the focus of a federal criminal investigation. The FBI had started investigating Spitzer after North Fork Bank alerted the Treasury Department about suspicious activity in his personal account.\textsuperscript{222} Spitzer had tried to structure a $10,000 cash transaction into three parts. Structuring is a federal criminal offense because it is done to keep the transactions under the $10,000 threshold so that banks will not report the activity to the government. After 9/11, banks have become more vigilant about monitoring possible structuring activity as a way to combat terrorism. The FBI initially thought that Spitzer was trying to hide bribes, but an investigation revealed that the recipients were shell companies associated with the Emperor’s Club V.I.P., a prostitution ring. Spitzer was therefore liable on two accounts: (1), his use of a prostitution agency, and (2) his attempt to hide it by structuring.\textsuperscript{223}

The FBI caught Spitzer on a federal wiretap making arrangements to meet with an escort in Washington, where he had reserved a hotel room for February 13, 2008. Spitzer used the name of a friend and campaign contributor, George Fox, as an alias, without Fox’s knowledge or permission, information that was noted in media coverage of the scandal. State records show that Spitzer indeed went to Washington that evening, and stayed at the Mayflower Hotel, a historic building that once hosted President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Hotel has been linked to political sex scandals in the past; it was where

\textsuperscript{220} Kramer 2007, November 15.
\textsuperscript{221} Mahoney 2007, November 13.
\textsuperscript{222} Van Natta 2008, March 13.
\textsuperscript{223} Ibid
President John K. Kennedy conducted one of his affairs, and where President Clinton was photographed hugging Monica Lewinsky during his campaign. After Spitzer (referred to as Client 9 by the escort agency) completed his session, the FBI also wiretapped a conversation the escort, Kristen, had with her booker, informing her that the encounter had gone well.\textsuperscript{224}

Prosecutors notified Spitzer’s staff that he was being investigated on Friday, March 7. After the \textit{New York Times} learned of the story, and announced the news on their website on March 10, Spitzer scheduled a press conference for the same day. His wife, Silda Wall Spitzer, stood next to him at the podium. A \textit{New York Times} article noted that, “before speaking, Mr. Spitzer stood with his arm around his wife; the two nodded and then strode forward together to face more than 100 reporters. Both had glassy, tear-filled eyes, but they did not cry.”\textsuperscript{225}

Spitzer made a vague statement acknowledging his guilt, but did not specify what the offense had been. “I have acted in a way that violates my obligation to my family and violates my or any sense of right or wrong. I apologize first and most importantly to my family. I apologize to the public to whom I promised better. I have disappointed and failed to live up to the standard I expected of myself. I must now dedicate some time to

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{silda_eliot_spitzer_press_conference.png}
\caption{Silda Wall Spitzer and Eliot Spitzer face journalists at a press conference, where Spitzer apologizes to his family and the public, on March 10, 2008.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{224} Feuer and Urbina 2008, March 11.
\textsuperscript{225} Hakim and Rashbaum 2008, March 10.
regain the trust of my family,” he said.\textsuperscript{226} He left the conference without taking questions from the press, or discussing whether or not he’d resign.

Wall Spitzer, did not speak at the conference, but her presence by his side was meant to convey her support for him. By walking over together to face the reporters, the Spitzers wanted to show that they were in this together. Spitzer’s arm around his wife further meant to imply that intimacy remained between them. The Spitzers went into seclusion the day after the press conference, remaining hidden in their luxury Manhattan apartment. The \textit{New York Times} ran a story that day stating that Wall Spitzer was discouraging Spitzer from resigning in haste, another indication that she was supporting him through the scandal.\textsuperscript{227} One day later, though, on March 12, Spitzer resigned in a press conference with Wall Spitzer by his side.\textsuperscript{228} News outlets speculated that Spitzer resigned as part of a deal with prosecutors to avoid prosecution, although the Justice Department denied this was the case.\textsuperscript{229} Nonetheless, Spitzer never faced any legal ramifications for structuring or using the services of an escort agency.

Spitzer tried to make a political comeback in 2013 by running in the Democratic primary for NYC Comptroller. Wall Spitzer did not join him on the campaign trail; her absence made more noticeable by Huma Abedin’s support of Anthony Weiner in a parallel campaign for mayor (Weiner had announced his campaign over a month before Spitzer entered the comptroller race). The news media interpreted this to be a sign of her disapproval. The main news story in the \textit{New York Daily News} reporting that Spitzer had entered the race also noted Wall Spitzer’s absence; the headline read: “Eliot Spitzer —

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{226} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{227} Konigsberg 2008, March 12.
\item \textsuperscript{228} Kocieniewski and Hakim 2008, March 13.
\item \textsuperscript{229} Johnston and Shenon 2008, March 21.
\end{itemize}
wife conspicuously absent — launches NYC controller [sic] campaign.” The article went on to state, “Eliot Spitzer charged onto the New York controller campaign trail Monday with a whirlwind of interviews and a chaotic appearance in Union Square — but without the woman who had long appeared at his side. Silda Spitzer, who famously stood with her husband when he resigned as governor five years ago for patronizing prostitutes, was a notable no-show as he returned to the political stage in a last-minute run for city controller.” An article on Slate remarked, “In an era where politicians’ wives are often among their most fervid advocates, Wall Spitzer’s silence is noticeable. It's not just that she's not there to humanize her husband—her absence keeps questions about their relationship and his transgressions front and center.”

Wall Spitzer’s visible discomfort at Spitzer’s press conferences resounded with reporters even years later. A New York Times article remarked, “Besides inviting uncomfortable questions on the trail, Ms. Wall Spitzer’s absence has deprived Mr. Spitzer, a Democrat, of the ally who could most potently make the case to voters that he has been rehabilitated: the woman whose ashen face at her husband’s resignation announcement remains a searing symbol of his ignominious downfall.” The same piece claimed that Wall Spitzer was not campaigning for Spitzer because they were now living apart, and that she disapproved of his candidacy. The New York Post cited anonymous sources who said that Wall Spitzer was angry that Spitzer had again thrust their lives into the spotlight, and planned on divorcing him as soon as his campaign was over.

230 Lovett, Durkin, Katz and Fermino 2013, July 8.
231 Ibid
232 Waldman 2013, July 18.
233 Grynbaum, 2013, July 16.
234 Ibid
Spitzer, however, denied that the couple was separated and maintained that Wall Spitzer was absent because she was busy with her banking career. Perhaps because of the more high-profile mayoral race, Spitzer received little media attention, and ultimately lost in the September primary. Two months later, on Christmas Eve, Spitzer and Wall Spitzer announced the end of their marriage, amidst reports that Spitzer was dating then Mayor-elect Bill de Blasio’s spokeswoman, Lis Smith.236

Spitzer’s scandal garnered extensive national coverage. His work as Attorney General had made him a high-profile national figure, and the media had even speculated that he might one day be the first Jewish candidate for President. To see which factors most impacted the tone of the coverage, I used a sample of 35 articles from the *New York Times, Washington Post, USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Daily News*, and *New York Post*, spanning from when Spitzer acknowledged his guilt to when he resigned from office (March 10-12, 2008). I used all the articles from these outlets that met the criteria outlined in the methods chapter. Both the parsimonious and intermediate solutions identify lack of focus on job performance and the lack of portrayal of Wall Spitzer as a victim as the causal conditions for non-negative coverage.

236 Ross, Niemietz and Gregorian 2014, January 15.
Figure 20: fsQCA truth table for coverage of the Spitzer scandal.

Figure 21: fsQCA complex solution for coverage of the Spitzer scandal.
Figure 22: fsQCA parsimonious solution for coverage of the Spitzer scandal.

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<tr>
<td>Algorithm: Quine-McCluskey</td>
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<td>True: 1-L</td>
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<tr>
<td>--- Parsimonious Solution ---</td>
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<td>frequency cutoff: 1.000000</td>
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<td>consistency cutoff: 6.102564</td>
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<tr>
<td>solution consistency: 0.104167</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 23: fsQCA intermediate solution for coverage of the Spitzer scandal.

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<tr>
<td>Model: ton = f(egr, job, sal, vict)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rows: 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Algorithm: Quine-McCluskey</td>
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<td>Don't Care: -</td>
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<tr>
<td>--- Intermediate Solution ---</td>
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<td>frequency cutoff: 1.000000</td>
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<td>consistency cutoff: 6.102564</td>
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<td>coverage</td>
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<td>-job=vict</td>
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<tr>
<td>solution coverage: 1.000000</td>
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<tr>
<td>solution consistency: 0.164167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coverage of the Spitzer scandal was overwhelmingly negative, as many of the outlets called on Spitzer to resign. An editorial in the *New York Times* argued:

Governor Spitzer has now twice violated his obligations to the people of New York. He violated their trust when, according to law enforcement officials, he patronized a prostitution ring. He compounded that violation Tuesday by hiding in his Fifth Avenue apartment and refusing to explain his actions or his future plans. To put it bluntly, Mr. Spitzer must either resign immediately or explain why he deserves to continue in office. It is almost impossible for us to imagine how he can survive this scandal and provide the credible leadership that his state needs.\(^\text{237}\)

The media’s anger at Spitzer was mirrored in the public, as 70 percent of New Yorkers felt Spitzer should resign, according to a WNBC/Marist College poll.\(^\text{238}\) Local outlets like the *Daily News* also devoted coverage on resignation, by polling their readers on whether or not Spitzer should resign. The *New York Times* even devoted an entire section of the paper to publishing Letters to the Editor written about the scandal. This is not to imply that the polling data or the negative editorials spurred Spitzer to resign – who was also facing potential prosecution at the time – but to emphasize that the media environment was hostile to him.

The scandal coverage focused heavily on the egregiousness of Spitzer’s actions. In fact, fsQCA analysis likely did not identify lack of egregiousness as a causal factor in non-negative coverage because all the articles in the sample discussed the egregiousness of the scandal. The articles discussed the possible legal charges he might face for structuring and violating the Mann Act, which made the transportation of a prostitute between states a federal crime in 1910 (Spitzer paid for his escort to travel from New York to Washington, D.C.). There was conjecture that he might have charged his campaign for two payments to the Mayflower Hotel, although federal prosecutors later

\[\text{\(^\text{237}\) New York Times Editorial Board 2008, March 12.}\]
\[\text{\(^\text{238}\) Marist Poll 2008, March 11.}\]
said that there wasn’t enough evidence to convict Spitzer of a crime.\textsuperscript{239} The news media also focused on what they perceived as Spitzer’s hypocrisy. Many of the pieces noted that Spitzer had prosecuted a prostitution ring himself as Attorney General, and even worked with anti-trafficking groups to pass legislation that targeted johns rather than sex workers.\textsuperscript{240} His “Mr. Clean” reputation was brought up repeatedly, and articles included his past statements on his commitment to morality. A piece in the \textit{Wall Street Journal} quoted him as having said, “I had a simple rule. I never asked if a case was popular or unpopular. I never asked if it was big or small, hard or easy. I simply asked if it was right or wrong,” regarding his work as Attorney General in an advertisement for his gubernatorial campaign.\textsuperscript{241} Articles in all the outlets also touched on the irony of a man who had described himself as a “steamroller” now facing a political downfall himself. The impact on job performance was touched on in few of the articles, which suggested that Spitzer had arranged for work in D.C. specifically so that he could meet with the escort. This exacerbated the egregiousness of the offense for reporters. Hiring prostitutes was bad enough; having his work schedule accommodate that illegal activity was even worse.

The articles that featured Wall Spitzer universally portrayed her as a victim. Rather than interpreting her appearance at the press conference as a show of strength and activism, reporters saw it as a sign of her suffering. An editorial in the \textit{Daily News} argued that Spitzer’s crime was not victimless, because of what he had done to his family, including his wife “who looked crushed yesterday [at the press conference].”\textsuperscript{242} In an op-

\textsuperscript{239} Zambito and McShane 2008, November 7.
\textsuperscript{240} Bernstein, Nina 2008, March 12.
\textsuperscript{241} Cohen and Efrati 2008, March 11.
ed not included in the sample, a columnist for the *Washington Post* described Wall Spitzer as “looking as a victim of food poisoning as she stood by her man’s side.” The outlets ran articles detailing how Wall Spitzer gave up an accomplished career in law to raise her children and support Spitzer’s political work. A *Washington Post* profile further humanized Wall Spitzer by describing her as “unfailingly polite” and “incredibly smart and warm and generous.” As sympathetic as many of the articles made her seem, though, they also made her appear to be submissive. An article in the *Daily News* noted, “Silda kept her weary eyes glued to her husband’s prepared script, lifting them just twice to glance at him and the rapt media, she appeared worn into submission.” Another piece in the *Daily News* described Spitzer’s resignation statement as “so pompously preposterous that the deep love shimmering his wife’s gaze was in danger of proving only deep delusion…the tragedy was not that she should be so devoted to him but that he should be so little devoted to her.” An article in the *New York Post* got very personal, by suggesting that “Silda Spitzer would be ‘prudent’ to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases – including HIV – given her sex-obsessed husband’s alleged preference for unprotected sex with hookers.”

Media coverage of the scandal was also filled with tawdry details. Outlets reported that in the wiretapped phone call, the escort had claimed that she had not found the client “difficult,” to which the booker responded by saying that others had not liked Spitzer, because he sometimes asked to do things that seemed unsafe. The *Daily News* and *New York Post* published pieces with details of the “steamy night” Spitzer shared

247 Burke and Celona 2008, March 12.
with the escort, noting that Spitzer did not like to wear a condom while having sex.

Spitzer’s escort, “Kristen,” or Alexandra Dupré, also courted media attention, appearing in risqué photo shoots with the *New York Post* and *Playboy*.

Spitzer’s lackluster performance in a lower-level city race implies that his political career is over. His recent appearances in the gossip sections of the *New York Post* and *New York Daily News* about his outings with his girlfriend indicate that Spitzer is no longer respected as a serious politician. Spitzer’s attempts to host political television programming, on outlets such as CNN and Current TV, have also proven to be unsuccessful. It is unclear what he plans to do next, although it is unlikely that there are any high-profile roles for him in the future.

**David Vitter**

In 2007, Deborah Palfrey, the “D.C. Madam” charged with running a prostitution ring in Washington, D.C., posted her business’s phone records on the Internet. Palfrey’s agency, Pamela Martin and Associates, had sent college-educated and professional women to male clients, but Palfrey denied that the women worked as prostitutes. She made the phone records public as a way to expose her powerful clients and spur them to support her case. A journalist from *Hustler* combed through that list, checking to see if there were any politicians who promoted “family values”; *Hustler* at that time had made a public commitment to exposing what they saw as hypocrisy, referring to politicians who had criticized Clinton’s extramarital affair but did not uphold traditional values themselves.\(^{248}\) The reporter found that Senator David Vitter from Louisiana, who

\(^{248}\) Babington 2007, July 10.
frequently espoused the merits of traditional marriage, had made several calls to the agency from 1999 to 2001.

After being contacted by Hustler for comment, Vitter immediately released a printed statement on July 9, admitting to his contact with the agency before he ran for Senate. His statement read:

This was a very serious sin in my past for which I am, of course, completely responsible. Several years ago, I asked for and received forgiveness from God and my wife in confession and marriage counseling. Out of respect for my family, I will keep my discussion of the matter there — with God and them. But I certainly offer my deep and sincere apologies to all I have disappointed and let down in any way.249

He did specify what the “serious sin” was, or explicitly state that he had used the services of an escort agency.

Vitter then went into seclusion, missing key votes, including one on legislation that would have limited the length of troop deployments in Iraq. His absence did little to quell the scandal, though. A woman told the press that Vitter had patronized her brothel in New Orleans, which had been shut down in 2001, although his name had not appeared in the records that were seized in the investigation. Vincent Bruno, a member of the Louisiana Republican Party’s central committee also confirmed the allegations.250 Another woman said Vitter had been a regular client of hers as a state representative in the 1990s, when she had worked as an escort.

Vitter had long been dogged by rumors of dalliances with prostitutes. Five years before the scandal took place, he had announced his candidacy for Governor in 2002, but then suddenly dropped out of the race, citing marital problems. Shortly after, an article in Louisiana Weekly claimed that Vitter had been in an 11-month relationship with a

249 Ibid.
When he ran for Senate two years later, Bruno accused Vitter of having an affair with a prostitute in New Orleans. Vitter dismissed the charges as “absolutely and completely untrue,” and as “crass Louisiana politics.” He went on to win the seat, becoming the first Republican to be popularly elected as a Senator in Louisiana (the previous Republican Senator, William Kellogg had been chosen by state legislature in 1876). While these earlier charges hadn’t gained much traction in the press at the time they were made, they were mentioned in the coverage of the 2007 scandal.

One week after releasing his printed statement, Vitter gave a press conference with his wife, Wendy Vitter, standing by his side. He said:

I want to again offer my deep, sincere apologies to all those I have let down and disappointed with these actions from my past. I am completely responsible. And I am so very, very sorry. No matter how long ago it was, I know this has hurt the relationship of trust I've enjoyed with so many of you, and that I have a lot of work to do to rebuild that. I will work every day to rebuild that trust. I confronted it in confession and marriage counseling. I believe I received forgiveness from God. I know I did from Wendy, and we put it behind us.

As reporters began shouting questions at Vitter, Wendy Vitter took the stand. She said [emphasis mine]:

To those of you who know me, are you surprised that I have something to say? You know, in most any other marriage, this would have been a private issue between a husband and a wife, very private. Obviously it is not here. Like all marriages, ours is not perfect. None of us are. But we chose to work together as a family. When David and I dealt with this several years ago, I forgave David. I made the decision to love him and to recommit to our marriage. To forgive is not always the easy choice, but it was and is the right choice for me. David is my best friend. Last week, some people very sympathetically said to me, ‘I wouldn't want to be in your shoes right now.’ I stand before you to tell you very proudly, I am proud to be Wendy Vitter.

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254 Ibid.
She then asked the media to stop harassing the family, saying that her four children, all under the age of 13, had suffered an “incredibly trying and very sad week.”

Vitter ended up riding out the scandal, serving out the remainder of his term and winning a second with 57 percent of the vote, defeating his Democratic opponent by a significant margin. One might attribute this to the state’s conservative leanings, but Vitter also did well in the Republican primary, capturing over 87 percent of the vote. He announced his intentions to run for governor of Louisiana in 2016, and polls now indicate that he is a frontrunner, with an 80% favorability rating amongst Republican voters.255

Wendy Vitter campaigned for Vitter when he ran for re-election in 2010. She had already set a precedent of supporting her husband’s political career, as when she left her job as a prosecutor to manage his first Congressional campaign.256 Journalists credited her support to Vitter’s political rehabilitation. As an article in the *Times-Picayune* noted then, “Wendy Vitter's public decision to support her husband after his phone number appeared in the records of a Washington escort service three years ago may have saved her husband's political career.”257 The piece also quoted Thomas Langston, a political scientist in Tulane University, as saying, “I think if Mrs. Vitter failed to ‘stand by her man’ in his moment of crisis, there might have been real sympathy for her and it would

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255 Berry 2014, January 3.
256 Moran 2007, July 22.
have negatively affected his standing with the people. The message that was being sent was that if she's willing to forgive him, why shouldn't we?" \(^{258}\)

There was national coverage of Vitter’s scandal, but attention was not as widespread as with some other scandals, such as Spitzer’s. Amongst the national outlets, as well as the Louisiana state newspapers, the *Times-Picayune* and the *Advocate*, only 20 articles meeting the sample criteria were found. The sample was chosen from articles published from July 9, 2007, when Vitter released a statement admitting to a “serious sin,” to December 9, 2007, until the scandal had long subsided. No articles were found from the *Wall Street Journal*, an indication of how there was less interest in the story. Since job performance was not mentioned in any of the articles, that variable was omitted from the analysis. The parsimonious solution, identified the portrayal of Wendy Vitter as an activist as a causal factor for non-negative news coverage, while the intermediate solution showed portrayal of her as an activist, lack of portrayal of her as an activist, and lack of a focus on salacious details were consistent with non-negative news coverage.

![Figure 25: fsQCA truth table for coverage of the Vitter scandal.](image)

\(^{258}\) *Ibid*
Figure 26: fsQCA complex solution for coverage of the Vitter scandal.
**Figure 27:** fsQCA parsimonious solution for coverage of the Vitter scandal.
Figure 28: fsQCA intermediate solution for coverage of the Vitter scandal.
Coverage of the Vitter scandal tended to less negative, particularly with articles published after Vitter gave his press conference. Prior to that, articles demanded more answers as to why he was lying low. As details were sparse on Vitter’s actual interaction with the agency, articles did not include much salacious information. Some salacious information was included in local coverage, focusing on the accounts of escorts who claimed to have had interactions with Vitter.

The press focused on the egregiousness of Vitter’s actions, particularly his hypocrisy as an outspoken supporter of traditional family values. He ran on family values platform in his campaigns. During President Bill Clinton’s scandal, Vitter had written an editorial in the *Times-Picayune* arguing that “Some meaningful action must be taken against the president. If none is, his leadership will only further drain any sense of values left to our political culture.”

Wendy Vitter was also mentioned in the coverage, and portrayed a supportive activist. An article in *Politico* (not included in the sample) noted, “At the couple's press conference, Wendy Vitter's voice never broke and her eyes never watered. For all intents and purposes, she seemed a woman on a mission: to stand by her man (or maybe even push him aside) to protect their marriage, their family and, perhaps, their investment.”

A piece in *The Times-Picayune* was decidedly impressed with Wendy Vitter, saying, “Wendy Vitter was defiant as she assumed the role of her husband's chief apologist and defender -- a performance that was all the more striking for the stunned and sad look that inhabited her face as her husband spoke of confession and marriage counseling.”

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259 Cillizza 2007, July 16.
261 Moran 2007, July 22.
Wendy Vitter’s confidence was even reflected in her appearance; as the article noted, “That dual persona -- intrepid woman, steadfast wife -- was on display down to the way she dressed. Wendy Vitter appeared not in a modest suit, but in a flattering wrap dress that some saw as having a leopard print. She stood taller than her husband in a pair of low heels.”

Not all of the coverage was as glowing, however. Many of the articles mentioned that Wendy Vitter had said in an interview in 2000, 7 years before the scandal, “I'm a lot more like Lorena Bobbitt than Hillary. If he does something like that, I'm walking away with one thing, and it's not alimony, trust me.” Bobbitt was an American citizen who had made world news when she cut off her husband’s penis in the middle of an argument (the trial revealed that her husband was abusive). The articles seemed to be hinting at her own hypocrisy in supporting her husband while having criticized another woman for having done the same. Yet even here she was not being portrayed as a victim.

Wendy Vitter’s defense helped Vitter garner more positive press coverage. However, Vitter also benefitted from the lack of salacious details available to the press, as well as the timeline of the scandal, which had occurred many years ago. His status as a popular politician also helped him overcome the scandal and continue his political career.

**Vitter and Spitzer**

Both Spitzer and Vitter were caught using the services of escort agencies, yet the tone of media coverage was much more critical of Spitzer than Vitter. However, while their offenses were similar, the contexts surrounding their scandals were vastly different. Vitter’s scandalous behavior had occurred years earlier, and once confronted by the news

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262 Ibid.
media, he was able to say that he had already atoned for his misdeeds. Spitzer’s behavior, on the other hand, was more recent and therefore reporters demanded immediate accountability. Further, Spitzer faced possible prosecution since he had also engaged in structuring, while Vitter appeared to be safe from any criminal investigations.

Spitzer received more attention from national news media than Vitter. He was the governor of a major state, and a national figure in his own right; a potential Presidential contender, there had already been great interest in him anyway. Further, some of the national outlets were invested in the scandal due to their own audiences. The *New York Times* is a national newspaper, but also a local one that focuses on news in New York. The *Wall Street Journal* published more pieces on Spitzer because of his contentious relationship with the New York finance industry. The scandal was so high-profile that it inspired an episode of *Law and Order* and the Emmy-nominated series, *The Good Wife*.

While both Spitzer and Vitter committed illegal activity, Spitzer’s actions seemed more egregious. For one, Spitzer had been the target of an FBI investigation, while Vitter’s actions were just exposed by a journalist. Spitzer could have been charged with violating the Mann Act or for structuring; there were not enough details to understand what exactly Vitter had done with the escort agency, and the statute of limitations had expired by the time the scandal was exposed anyway. The fact that the wrongdoing had been done in the past, and that Vitter had sought marriage counseling afterwards indicated that perhaps he was a chastened, if not changed, man. Spitzer also appeared to be more of a hypocrite, because rather than just discussing morality, as Vitter, he had actually prosecuted prostitution rings as Attorney General. An article in the *New York Times* captured the hypocrisy of a law enforcer being breaking the law; the lede stated,

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263 Alpert 2007, July 12.
“Gov. Eliot Spitzer, who gained national prominence relentlessly pursuing Wall Street wrongdoing, has been caught on a federal wiretap arranging to meet with a high-priced prostitute at a Washington hotel last month, according to a law enforcement official and a person briefed on the investigation.”

Because of this, Spitzer had also made a lot of enemies rejoice at his fall. All the news outlets included in this study published articles on how Spitzer’s foes on Wall Street were celebrating his downfall. They included statements by Republicans allied with Wall Street, such as Congressman Peter King, on how Spitzer had unfairly targeted the finance industry in the first place.

Since details were so sparse on Vitter, the articles were also less salacious. It should be noted that there were rumors in the blogosphere, which then made their way to late night comedy shows that Vitter liked to wear diapers with the prostitutes. This information was not reported in the sample articles, probably because there is no evidence to back up the rumor. This would be an appropriate place to point out that different outlets have different standards for agenda-setting. While the *Times-Picayune* might have shied away from reporting the rumor without a source, had Vitter been in New York, an outlet like the *New York Post* might have had fewer qualms about including the information. Conversely, there was plenty of information available on Spitzer through the FBI’s wiretapped conversations, which made for sordid coverage.

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Another important difference between the Vitter and Spitzer scandals is that while Wendy Vitter was received as an assertive supporter of her husband by the press, Wall Spitzer was perceived as a victim instead.

That Wendy Vitter spoke out in support of her husband, while Wall Spitzer just stood by her husband’s side, contributed to this perception. Not only did this make Wendy Vitter’s support for her husband clear, but it also made her into an active agent. It is also not surprising that Wendy Vitter appeared to be more confident and collected, in a low-cut patterned dress. Articles on Wall-Spitzer, on the other hand, described how dejected she looked, standing next to her husband at the press conference. To put it succinctly, the press felt sorry for Wall Spitzer, but did not feel the same pity for Wendy Vitter.

The political circumstances of the scandals could have also impacted the coverage and outcomes of the sex scandals. Vitter’s record as one of the most conservative members of the Senate helped him win popularity in Louisiana, especially as he staunchly opposed the Affordable Care Act. He was the most popular elected official in Louisiana at the time the scandal was revealed.²⁶⁵

As in the case of Clinton, Vitter had a solid policy record, one that his constituency favored. Other Republicans in his party also spoke out in support; Senator Jim DeMint said, “This [D.C.] can be a very lonely and isolating place to be away from your family. So, I’m certainly not going to judge him because I don’t want that kind of pressure on me.”266 The Governor of Louisiana at the time, Kathleen Blanco, was a Democrat, and Republicans feared that she would appoint a Democratic replacement if Vitter stepped down. Spitzer, however, had a tough year as governor before the scandal was exposed, and received low public approval ratings. After his scandal, most Democrats refused to give comment to the press, knowing they had little to gain by supporting an unpopular governor.

Despite the differences between the political outcomes of the two cases, fsQCA analysis reveals an important similarity: the wife’s role was a causal condition for the tone of news coverage. For Spitzer, lack of portrayal of the wife as a victim was the causal condition for positive news coverage, while for Vitter, it was the portrayal of the wife as an activist. This result sheds light on the importance of the type of support the wife provides and how the media interprets it. Through having their wives accompany them at their press conferences, both Spitzer and Vitter hoped to communicate that their spouses supported them. Yet Wall Spitzer was perceived as a victim and Wendy Vitter was seen as a supportive activist. This suggests that merely standing next to the politician is not an effective enough strategy to garner more positive coverage.

266 Alpert 2007, July 12.
John Edwards and Mark Sanford

Before their scandals occurred, the careers of Senator John Edwards and Governor Mark Sanford both were on the rise. In the 2008 Presidential elections, Edwards was considered to be a potential running mate for Democratic nominee Barack Obama. In 2009, there was speculation that Sanford would run for president in 2012, after making the shortlist for running mate to the 2008 Republican nominee, John McCain. Yet they both risked their high-profile political careers by engaging in extramarital affairs. Unlike the other politicians in this case study, these men had mistresses with whom they had serious relationships. The fallout was immense in both cases, particularly since their wives – both of whom worked extensively on their husbands’ political campaigns – publicly shared their suffering and eventually separated from their philandering spouses.

John Edwards

The 2008 Democratic primary had not been going well for John Edwards, former Senator of North Carolina. Overshadowed by candidates Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, he was polling at a distant third and had little chance of winning the nomination. In the midst of Edwards’ campaign troubles, The National Enquirer, a supermarket tabloid, broke a story on October 10, 2007 reporting that he had engaged in an extramarital affair with a campaign worker. That day, the Huffington Post reported that the name of the worker was Rielle Hunter, a filmmaker who had produced short online documentaries, or “webisodes,” for his political action committee, and on October 11, New York magazine published a piece that linked Hunter to the Enquirer story.
The potential scandal was particularly explosive because Edward’s wife, Elizabeth Edwards, had incurable breast cancer. The public viewed Elizabeth Edwards, who had campaigned for Edwards despite her illness, with great sympathy. As a writer for Slate noted, “If a politician whose chief appeal is his self-advertised loyalty to his brave, ill wife cheats on his brave ill wife, what's he good for again?”

It was not a full-blown scandal yet, however, because many viewed the Enquirer story with skepticism. Edwards seized on people’s doubts by dismissing the story as “tabloid trash.” He declared, “I’ve been in love with the same woman [Elizabeth] for 30-plus years, and as anybody who’s been around us knows, she’s an extraordinary human being, warm, loving, beautiful, sexy and as good a person as I have ever known. So the story's just false.” Hunter denied the story through her attorney, who described it as “completely unfounded and ridiculous.”

The Enquirer maintained that the story was accurate. On December 19, 2007, the tabloid published an article reporting that Hunter was more than six months pregnant, along with a photo of a visibly pregnant Hunter leaving an ob-gyn office. The piece noted that Hunter had relocated to North Carolina, where she was living in a gated community near Andrew Young, a campaign aide that had closely worked with Edwards. Young, a married man with children, claimed that he had gotten Hunter pregnant. The Enquirer dismissed this as a cover-up to hide that Edwards was the real father of the child. On July 22, around 2 AM, Edwards had a run-in with Enquirer reporters at the Beverly Hilton Hotel, after the publication received information that he would be visiting Hunter and her baby there. Edwards hid in the bathroom until he was escorted out by hotel security.

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268 Coscarelli 2012, March 22.
269 Ibid.
*Enquirer* published a story about the encounter, claiming to have video evidence proving that Hunter and Edwards had met. Edwards and Hunter denied allegations of the affair again on July 23.

Despite the *Enquirer*’s relentless pursuit of the story, the mainstream media ignored the scandal. Publications like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* had yet to report on the story, and cable news stayed mum as well. The blogosphere speculated that the mainstream media was ignoring the scandal out of respect for Elizabeth Edwards. When the story first broke, a reporter for *Slate* speculated that Edwards’ “unaddressed” scandal would “surface in a matter of days or weeks *should Edwards win in Iowa*. Right now the MSM [mainstream media] is giving him a pass because--hey, why bring it up and hurt his wife if he's going to lose anyway.”

As the *Enquirer* continued reporting developments over the next few months, those working in the mainstream media said that because Edwards was no longer in office nor running for a position (having conceded the race on January 26), they did not consider the scandal to be worthy of extensive reporting. As Linda Winslow, executive producer of the *NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, explained, “It was decided not to report the story in our news summary on the grounds that Edwards is not a candidate for public office, and not on any short list for Vice President or any other public office, so it struck us as a problem for him and his family, not the American public.”

This was similar to how Jonathan Weisman, a political reporter for the *Washington Post*, felt. “Edwards is no longer an elected official and is not running for any office now. Don't expect wall-to-wall coverage,” he said.

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However, several mainstream outlets began reporting on the allegations in July 2008, as Edwards surfaced as a choice for Democratic nominee Barack Obama’s running mate in the 2008 elections. A month later, on August 7, Edwards admitted on ABC News that he did have an affair with Hunter, but denied paternity of her daughter. Elizabeth Edwards published a post on the liberal blog *Daily Kos*, which supported Edwards and chastised the media for their “voyeurism.” The statement read (emphasis mine):

- **Our family has been through a lot.** Some caused by nature, some caused by human weakness, and some – most recently – caused by the desire for sensationalism and profit without any regard for the human consequences. None of these has been easy. But we have stood with one another through them all. Although John believes he should stand alone and take the consequences of his action now, when the door closes behind him, he has his family waiting for him.

- **John made a terrible mistake in 2006.** The fact that it is a mistake that many others have made before him did not make it any easier for me to hear when he told me what he had done. But he did tell me. And we began a long and painful process in 2006, a process oddly made somewhat easier with my diagnosis in March of 2007. This was our private matter, and I frankly wanted it to be private because as painful as it was I did not want to have to play it out on a public stage as well. Because of a recent string of hurtful and absurd lies in a tabloid publication, because of a picture falsely suggesting that John was spending time with a child it wrongly alleged he had fathered outside our marriage, our private matter could no longer be wholly private.

  The pain of the long journey since 2006 was about to be renewed. John has spoken in a long on-camera interview I hope you watch. **Admitting one’s mistakes is a hard thing for anyone to do, and I am proud of the courage John showed by his honesty in the face of shame.** The toll on our family of news helicopters over our house and reporters in our driveway is yet unknown. But now the truth is out, and the repair work that began in 2006 will continue. **I ask that the public, who expressed concern about the harm John’s conduct has done to us, think also about the real harm that the present voyeurism does and give me and my family the privacy we need at this time.**

Elizabeth Edwards published a book of memoirs, *Resilience*, in May 2009 that discussed the scandal. She wrote that when she learned of the affair, she cried and screamed, and threw up in the bathroom. Elizabeth Edwards explained why she had

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forgiven Edwards despite feeling betrayed: she still believed in the work they had done together, and appreciated his support as she battled cancer. “I lie in bed, circles under my eyes, my sparse hair sticking in too many directions, and he looks at me as if I am the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. It matters,” she wrote.\(^{273}\) She did not spend too much time discussing Edward’s affair, focusing instead on the tragedy of her son’s death at age 16 in a car crash and coming to terms with her terminal cancer.

In a promotional interview for the book on The Oprah Winfrey Show, Elizabeth Edwards said that Edwards had initially told her that he had only been unfaithful for one night.\(^{274}\) Sensing the public humiliation and media circus that would occur if someone learned of Edward’s infidelity, she asked him to drop out of the race. However, Edwards told her, “If you want to raise a lot of questions, what you do is get out of a campaign you got in two days before.”\(^{275}\) Edwards only revealed that the affair had lasted for months once he had admitted the affair to the public. Elizabeth Edwards reiterated her commitment to Edwards on the show, though, saying, “This is a really good man who really did a very, very bad thing. If you take that piece out, I do have a perfect marriage. I have a husband who adores me, who is unbelievable with my children.” She again explained how her cancer had impacted her views on the scandal. “In times where I been in enormous pain, with the death of Wade or with the cancer, he's been by my side…Being sick meant a number of things to me. One is that my life was going to be less long, and I didn't want to spend it fighting,” she said.

The scandal resurfaced again the next year. In January 2010, Young published a tell-all book, The Politician: An Insider’s Account of John Edwards, which delved into

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\(^{274}\) Winfrey 2009, May 7.  
\(^{275}\) Ibid.
the affair. Two weeks before the book was slated for release, Edwards admitted that he was the father of Hunter’s child in a statement. “It was wrong for me ever to deny she was my daughter, and, hopefully, one day, when she understands, she will forgive me,” he said.276 Young had revealed in the book that Edwards was the baby’s father, and that he had asked Young to claim paternity as a cover-up.

The next week, Elizabeth Edwards announced that she had separated from Edwards. In June 2010, she released Resilience with a new epilogue that discussed her separation. In an interview with the Today Show, she said, “I think I did marry a marvelous man. I think that he changed over time. And it could not be more clear to me then. You know, I think it was sort of hard for me to see it or admit it for a very long time. But he changed. Maybe we all change over time. And he's no longer the person who I married.”277 Elizabeth Edwards said she had decided to separate from Edwards because she wanted to “reclaim her life.”278 She explained:

I knew I could no longer be John’s wife. It was a sad and terrifying decision. I’d been trying to reinvent the role of wife for the last two years, trying to find a place where I could be happy and still be John’s wife despite his infidelity. Each day, it seemed another piece of my history chipped away...and at the very end of 2009, I finally gave up trying. I wanted to be present in the remainder of my life. I’m not just a cuckolded wife.279

Later that year, Elizabeth Edwards died on December 7, 2010. Edwards was by her side in the hospital room, and also attended her funeral with their children.

In May 2011, the Justice Department indicted Edwards for campaign finance fraud. Edwards had solicited nearly $1 million from wealthy donors to pay for Hunter’s

277 Lauer, 2010, June 29.
278 Charaipotra 2010, June 30.
279 Ibid.
accommodations, travel, and medical expenses. The prosecution considered the funds to be campaign donations, arguing that his campaign would have been over if the scandal was revealed to the public. If the contributions were indeed campaign donations they were illegal because they exceeded the $2300 individual limit. Edwards argued in turn that the money had never been intended for his campaign; it had been a gift to help him hide the affair from his wife, not the public. As the Federal Election Commission hadn’t considered those funds to be campaign contributions, there was speculation that the Justice Department was politically motivated.

The case went to trial in 2012, after Edwards rejected a plea deal that would have required him to do time in jail. It was a risky move, since Edwards faced at least five years in jail if he was convicted of even one count, and up to 30 years in jail and $1.5 million in fines if convicted of all charges. The prosecution relied heavily on Young as a witness, whom the jury found to be untrustworthy, as he had profited himself from the scandal by pocketing most of the money meant for Hunter. Ultimately, the jury acquitted Edwards on a charge of accepting illegal campaign contributions and declared a mistrial on the other charges. Instead of trying Edwards again, the Justice Department decided to drop the case.

Since Edwards’ scandal occurred throughout four years, this study examined media coverage from four key periods: (1) when Edwards admitted the affair (August 8-September 8, 2008); (2) when he admitted paternity (January 21-February 21, 2010); (3)

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280 Seelye 2011, June 4.
281 Ibid.
282 Ibid.
283 Roig-Franzia 2012, June 01.
284 Severson 2012, May 11.
285 Roig-Franzia 2012, June 01.
when he was indicted by the Justice Department (May 24-June 5, 2011); and (4) when his case went to trial (April 23-June 15, 2012). Although the coverage was overwhelmingly negative, more neutral stories were published during the trial. Outlets like the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* printed editorials disapproving of the trial, arguing that his behavior was immoral, but not illegal. The reaction to the trial will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

According to fsQCA analysis, the parsimonious solution identified the portrayal of Elizabeth Edwards as an activist as the causal condition for non-negative coverage. The intermediate solution identifies lack of salaciousness, portraying Elizabeth Edwards as an activist supporting her husband, and not portraying her as a victim as the causal conditions for non-negative coverage. As job performance was not mentioned in any of the articles, that factor was not included in the analysis.

![Figure 31: fsQCA truth table for coverage of the Edwards scandal.](image)
Figure 32: fsQCA complex solution for coverage of the Edwards scandal.

Figure 33: fsQCA parsimonious solution for coverage of the Edwards scandal.
The news media were taken aback by the egregiousness of Edwards’ actions. They touched upon Edwards’ hypocrisy for criticizing President Clinton for having an affair with Monica Lewinsky. *USA Today* noted that he had said then that Clinton’s “remarkable disrespect ... for the moral dimensions of leadership, for his friends, for his wife, for his precious daughter” was “breathtaking.”286 Most of the focus, however, was on Edwards’ betrayal of Elizabeth Edwards and the subsequent cover-up. After the jurors declared a mistrial, *USA Today* ran an editorial arguing that it was hardly a victory for Edwards:

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286 USA Today Editorial Board 2008, August 11.
Sure, Edwards got off, apparently after defense attorneys convinced jurors he was a liar, a cad and a sinner -- but not a criminal. Was there anybody who didn't already know what he was? He cheated on his wife, fathered a child with another woman, had an aide falsely claim paternity, and lied about it on national TV, all while his wife was dying of cancer. The nation is fortunate that someone of such flawed character never made it to the White House.\textsuperscript{287}

While maintaining that Edwards’ behavior was morally offensive, the sampled articles disagreed with the Justice Department’s decision to indict Edwards. As the \textit{Washington Post} published in an editorial, “Mr. Edwards is a cad, to put it mildly. His deplorable conduct would appear to have ended a once promising political career. It is troubling that the Justice Department would choose to devote its scarce resources to pursuing this questionable case.”\textsuperscript{288}

While there were not many tawdry details available to the press, the scandal itself was of a salacious nature. Not only did Edwards father a child with his mistress, but he also first denied paternity and orchestrated a cover-up. One reporter compared the developments to the \textit{Maury Povich Show}.\textsuperscript{289} The articles also reported that Edwards had made a sex tape with Hunter, which Young tried to use as blackmail.\textsuperscript{290}

Many of the news articles glossed over Elizabeth Edwards’ statements of support for Edwards, focusing on her pain instead. They repeatedly noted how Edwards had been unfaithful to her while she was battling with terminal breast cancer. Most of the articles that victimized Elizabeth Edwards were written after her death, when Edwards was on trial. A \textit{New York Times} article recounted the testimony of a former aide, Elizabeth Reynolds, who told the jury:

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{287} USA Today Editorial Board 2012, June 1.  
\textsuperscript{288} Washington Post Editorial Board 2011, June 4.  
\textsuperscript{289} USA Today Editorial Board 2008, August 11.  
\textsuperscript{290} Severson and Schwartz 2012, June 9. 
\end{flushright}
‘She stormed off and sort of collapsed into a sort of ball in the parking lot,’ Ms. Reynolds recalled. She and another friend of Mrs. Edwards comforted her, she said, and led her to a restroom. But, she said, Mrs. Edwards, who had had a lumpectomy to treat her breast cancer in 2004, grew enraged once again and confronted Mr. Edwards again. ‘You don't see me anymore; you're not seeing me!’ Mrs. Edwards shouted at her husband, Ms. Reynolds told jurors. ‘And then she took off her shirt and her bra.’

The *Washington Post* described how Elizabeth Edwards had told friends that she feared “she would be alone when she died,” without “a man around her who loved her.”

Considering that Edwards’ actions were considered to be particularly egregious because of the pain he caused his dying wife, it is not surprising that the news media tended to victimize her.

When Edwards first admitted the affair, the outlets also published articles explaining why they had ignored the story before. For one, they argued that the *Enquirer*, a tabloid that paid for information, was not the most credible source. Bill Keller, Executive Editor of the *New York Times*, had said that he was “not going to recycle a supermarket tabloid's anonymously sourced story.” The *Enquirer*’s anonymous sources also made it difficult for other outlets to confirm the story. As Leonard Downie Jr., then Executive Editor of the *Washington Post* said, “These kinds of allegations fly around about just about every candidate. We checked them out and we asked questions, and at no time did we have any facts to report.” Further, Edwards was third in the Democratic primary when the scandal first broke, and outlets wanted to use their resources reporting on the frontrunners. Richard Stevenson, who directed the *New York Times*’ campaign coverage, believed that Edwards was “fair game for journalism of this sort, but this hasn't

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293 Hoyt 2008, August 9
294 Perez-Pena and Bill Carter 2008, August 9.
seemed to me to be a high priority for us at this moment.”295 As noted earlier, once he dropped out of the race, reporters felt they had even less reason to cover the story since he was not in office or running for it. In retrospect, a *Washington Post* reporter disagreed with that reasoning, arguing, “He's a two-time presidential candidate, was the party’s nominee for vice president four years ago, and was carrying on with the smitten Hunter -- a fledgling filmmaker paid with campaign funds during his White House run. Do the standards change dramatically the day after you drop out?”296 Reporters dismissed charges of liberal bias by pointing out that they had extensively covered other Democratic sex scandals, including President Bill Clinton and New York Governor Eliot Spitzer.297 Journalists also admitted that they did not pursue the story out of sympathy for Elizabeth Edwards. A *Washington Post* reporter explained, “The Elizabeth Edwards factor cannot be underestimated [in deciding not to report on the story]. The enormous public sympathy for a woman who campaigned for her husband, even as she battled an incurable form of cancer, extended to many of the reporters who followed and interviewed her on the trail.”298

Today, Edwards runs a law firm with his oldest daughter in Washington, D.C. He has committed himself to fighting global poverty, telling the press after the trial, “I don't think God's through with me. I really believe he thinks there's still some good things I can do.”299 While Edwards might be able to redeem himself somewhat through charity, it is safe to say that his political career is effectively over.

295 Hoyt 2008, August 9
296 Kurtz 2008, August 11.
297 Ibid.
298 Ibid.
299 Roig-Franzia 2012, June 1
Mark Sanford

South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford was a rising star in the Republican Party. On the shortlist for 2008 GOP Presidential candidate John McCain’s running mate, there was widespread speculation in the news media that Sanford would run for the GOP nomination in 2012.\(^{300}\) As Chairman of the Republican Governor’s Association, Sanford had established himself as a strong opponent of President Obama by fighting against his economic stimulus package. He was the only governor to file a lawsuit, instead of accepting $700 million in aid for his state (although he ultimately lost the case). His frequent appearances on national news outlets also made him a well-known political figure.

In 2009, Sanford made headlines of a different nature. On June 22, the A.P. reported that Sanford had been “missing” since June 18.\(^{301}\) His whereabouts were unknown both to his wife and the State Law Enforcement Division responsible for his protection. Sanford’s state and personal phones were turned off and he was not responding to any phone or text messages. Amidst the uncertainty of what had happened to him, there were also questions of whether an Acting Governor should be appointed, and who that person should be. The news media did not suspect foul play, since Sanford had taken other trips without his security detail in the past.\(^{302}\) Further, his wife, Jenny Sanford, had reassured the public that Sanford had told her he was leaving to get some work done without being distracted by the children. Sanford’s office confirmed that Sanford had told them that he would be gone for some time, and would be difficult to

\(^{300}\) Brown and Dewan 2009, June 25.
\(^{301}\) Kennedy 2009, June 23.
\(^{302}\) Ibid.
reach. Later that day, Sanford’s spokesman told the press that Sanford was hiking the Appalachian Trail.

On June 23, Sanford contacted his office and said that he would be back at work the next day to quell the media frenzy surrounding his absence. After receiving a tip from someone who had claimed to see Sanford on an airplane to Argentina, the South Carolina newspaper *The State* dispatched a reporter to the Atlanta airport on June 24, where there was an incoming flight from Argentina. Sanford gave the reporter a sit-down interview in which he claimed that he had been alone in Argentina, and that while he had initially thought about going to the Appalachian Trail, he decided instead to go someplace more exotic.

Later that day, Sanford held a press conference where he announced that he had gone to Argentina to meet a woman with whom he’d been having an extramarital affair. “I have been unfaithful to my wife. I developed a relationship with a -- what started out as a dear, dear friend from Argentina. It began very innocently, as I suspect many of these things do, in just a casual e-mail back and forth, in advice on one's life there and advice here,” he said.303

Sanford told reporters that the eight-year friendship relationship had started out innocently, but had turned romantic that past year. He maintained that this was the only time he was unfaithful to his wife, and denied asking his staff to cover up where he had been the past few days. In the rambling 10-minute statement, Sanford apologized 11 times, to his wife, four sons, staff, friends, parents-in-laws, the residents of South Carolina, and “people of faith” across the country. As a gesture of conciliation, he

303 Sanford 2009, June 24.
announced his resignation as the chair of the Republican Governors Association, but refused to say whether he would resign from office.

Describing his actions as selfish, Sanford noted how his betrayal must have especially stung his wife, who had “stood by [his] side in campaign after campaign after campaign.” He told the press that Jenny Sanford, who wasn’t present at the conference, had learned of the affair a few months ago; to recover from the blow, they had attended marriage counseling sessions at a church. When a reporter asked him if they were separated, he said, “I don't know how you want to define that. I mean, I'm here and she's there. I guess in a formal sense we're not. But you know, what we're trying to do is work through something that, you know, we've been working through for a number of months now.”

Sanford was also insistent that his relationship had not just been a tawdry affair. “I spent the last five days of my life crying in Argentina, so I could repeat it when I came back here in saying, you know, while indeed from a heart level, there was something real, it was a place based on the fiduciary relationship I had, to the people of South Carolina, based on my boys, based on my wife, based on where I was in life, based on where she was in life, a place I couldn't go and she couldn't go,” he said.

Later that day, Jenny Sanford also released a statement, where she said that she had asked Sanford to leave two weeks ago as part of a trial separation, “with the goal of ultimately strengthening [their] marriage.” She said [emphasis mine]:

I would like to start by saying I love my husband and I believe I have put forth every effort possible to be the best wife I can be during our almost twenty years of marriage[…]

304 Ibid.
305 Ibid.
306 Ibid.
I personally believe that the greatest legacy I will leave behind in this world is not the job I held on Wall Street, or the campaigns I managed for Mark, or the work I have done as First Lady or even the philanthropic activities in which I have been routinely engaged. Instead, **the greatest legacy I will leave in this world is the character of the children I, or we, leave behind.** It is for that reason that I deeply regret the recent actions of my husband Mark, and their potential damage to our children.

[...] Psalm 127 states that sons are a gift from the Lord and children a reward from Him. I will continue to pour my energy into raising our sons to be honorable young men. I remain willing to forgive Mark completely for his indiscretions and to welcome him back, in time, if he continues to work toward reconciliation with a true spirit of humility and repentance.

**This is a very painful time for us and I would humbly request now that members of the media respect the privacy of my boys and me as we struggle together to continue on with our lives and as I seek the wisdom of Solomon, the strength and patience of Job and the grace of God in helping to heal my family.**

Despite requesting privacy from the media, the Sanfords continued to provide more details to reporters. In interviews with the A.P., Sanford said, “I will be able to die knowing that I had met my soul mate.” He insisted that “this was a whole lot more than a simple affair, this was a love story. A forbidden one, a tragic one, but a love story at the end of the day.” Regardless, Sanford said he would “try” to fall back in love with his wife, out of commitment to his sons and his marriage. Jenny Sanford told the press that she had learned of the affair five months ago by finding a love letter on Sanford’s desk. She was shocked to learn that he had been in Argentina that past week, after she had asked him to end the affair.

Sanford told the A.P. that he would not resign, arguing that he had been able to do his job and “in fact excel at it.” To appease concerns that he had used state funds to pay for his trysts, he wrote a check to the state legislature for $3,304, the cost of an

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307 Dewan 2009, August 8
308 Ibid.
309 Ibid.
310 Ibid.
311 Ibid.
official trip he had taken to Brazil and Argentina, where he had also met with his mistress, Maria Belen Chapur, in 2008. 312 Sanford denied that any other state funds had been used to enable him to meet Chapur; he had used frequent flyer miles to pay for the plane ticket of his most recent trip to Argentina. 313

The week after Sanford’s interviews, Jenny Sanford released another statement on July 9, where she thanked people for their support for her and her family. “Please know that my sons and I are doing fine, given the circumstances. We are surrounded by friends and family, and we will make it through this,” she said. 314 She described Sanford’s behavior as “inexcusable,” and said that he had to “earn back that [broken] trust, first and foremost with his family, and also with the people of South Carolina.” By emphasizing that he needed forgiveness “first and foremost” from his family, Jenny Sanford made it clear that this was largely a family, not political, matter. Jenny Sanford also hinted that forgiveness did not necessarily mean that she would remain married to Sanford, saying, “My forgiveness is essential for us both to move on with our lives, with peace, in whatever direction that may take us.” She ended her statement emphasizing again that Sanford’s actions were largely private, and not political failings:

Mark showed a lack of judgment in his recent actions as governor. However, his far more egregious offenses were committed against God, the institutions of marriage and family, our boys and me. Mark has stated that his intent and determination is to save our marriage, and to make amends to the people of South Carolina. I hope he can make good on those intentions, and for the sake of our boys I leave the door open to it. In that spirit of forgiveness, it is up to the people and elected officials of South Carolina to decide whether they will give Mark another chance as well.

312 Rucker 2009, July 3.
313 Ibid.
314 Ibid.
One month later, though, Jenny Sanford and her children moved out of the governor’s mansion, leaving Sanford behind on August 7. While she could have moved out discreetly by hiring a company to pack her belongings, Jenny Sanford carried boxes herself in broad daylight. Journalists used photos of her moving out to report that the Sanfords’ marriage was crumbling. Jenny Sanford sent the news media, and by extension the public, a pointed message that she would not tolerate Sanford’s behavior.

Jenny Sanford was then profiled in the September issue of Vogue, in a piece that portrayed her as an alternative to other political wives caught in the midst of sex scandals. “Before Jenny Sanford came along, the options for wronged political wives were pretty poor. You could suffer silently (see Silda Wall Spitzer), deny everything (hello, Hillary), or make catty asides about the harlot who caused your husband to stray (Elizabeth Edwards). Then came Jenny Sanford,” the article began. In the piece, Jenny Sanford reiterated her willingness to forgive Sanford. As the writer said, “She had kicked the lying bum out of the house when he refused to give up his mistress, but marriage is complex, life is hard, and if he wanted to try and make the marriage work, the door was open.” Jenny Sanford attributed Sanford’s affair to the corrupting influence of politics and a mid-life crisis. In the piece, Jenny Sanford emphasized her forgiveness for Sanford

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315 Dewan 2009, August 8
316 Johnson 2009, September
– and even his mistress – but not at the expense of highlighting their inexcusable behavior. She told the magazine:

Mark is not a bad person. What the world saw in that press conference is someone who is struggling. None of us are perfect. We are all trying to do the best we can. I also feel sorry for the other woman. I am sure she is a fine person. It can't be fun for her, though I do sometimes question her judgment. If she knew the newspaper had those e-mails back in December, why did she want him to come in June? But I can't go there too much. All I can do is pray for her because she made some poor choices. Mark made some poor choices. A lot of people were brought down by this, and I am sure that is not what they wanted.317

On September 8, South Carolina House Speaker Bobby Harrell called on Sanford to resign, followed by the House Republican Caucus, which controlled the House, the next day.318 The House Democrat Caucus then called on Sanford to resign on October 2, showing that the legislature as a whole wanted Sanford to resign.319 With his penchant for the line-item veto, Sanford had routinely come into conflict with other members in the South Carolina legislature, even with members of his own party. He once protested pork-barrel spending by bringing pigs to the House Chamber.320 The legislature would not have been sorry to see him leave.

The South Carolina Ethics Commission charged Sanford with 37 violations of state ethic laws pertaining to his use of campaign funds, his use of state aircraft, and his

317 Ibid.
319 Associated Press 2009, October 2.
320 Copeland and Stone 2009, June 25.
use of business-class airline tickets (none of this pertained to the scandal) on November 23. 321 Separately, the legislature filed an impeachment resolution against Sanford for “serious misconduct” and “dereliction of duty,” for leaving the state without appointing an Acting Governor, lying about his whereabouts, and directing “members of his staff in a manner that caused them to deceive and mislead the public.” 322 However, the ad hoc committee looking into the resolution ultimately voted 6-1 to not impeach him on December 9, opting for censure instead. On December 11, Jenny Sanford announced that she was filing for divorce. As Sabato said, “She impeached him when the Legislature wouldn't. In the future you will have people asking whether the wronged spouses will follow the Hillary Clinton example, or the Jenny Sanford example.” 323

On December 16, the full House Judiciary Committee decided not to impeach Sanford, and instead censured him with a 15-6 vote, formally ending the process. As Sanford had only one year left in office, and was term-limited from running for Governor again, the committee thought it best to let him finish the term. 324 The legislature’s decision to not impeach Sanford had underlying political reasons. Lieutenant Governor Andre Bauer, who would have been Sanford’s successor had he been impeached, posed a threat to other politicians who wanted to run for governor after Sanford’s term finished. Knowing that Bauer was politically ambitious, they did not want to give him the opportunity to run as an incumbent. 325 Those not interested in running for governor were dubious of Bauer’s ability to govern. Known for his reckless driving record and for crashing an airplane, Bauer had reacted so aggressively to being pulled over for speeding

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322 Ibid.
323 Kropf 2009, December 12.
324 Dewan 2009, December 17.
once that an officer held him at gunpoint. He hardly seemed like a suitable alternative to Sanford.\textsuperscript{326} One might wonder why both parties, especially Sanford’s own Republican Party, urged him to resign when they were wary of his replacement. As there were no political ramifications in asking Sanford to resign, it provided an easy means for the politicians to distance themselves; further, a quick resignation does not cause the same damage as a long-drawn out trial.\textsuperscript{327}

In December, Jenny Sanford was chosen as one of Barbara Walters’ “Most Fascinating People of 2009.” Walters considered her to be different from other political wives whose husbands were caught in the middle of sex scandals. “She was a new kind of woman and, as it turns out, she struck a chord. We have had a year of wives standing tight-lipped and unhappy next to their husbands… She wasn't a victim. She was independent and true to herself,” Walters said.\textsuperscript{328} Jenny Sanford insisted that Sanford’s actions “reflect poorly on him,” but did not take away her “own self-esteem.”\textsuperscript{329} She also told Walters that Sanford had begged her to see his mistress one last time. “It never occurred to me that this person I knew, who was actually a fairly grounded person, would be asking me something so morally offensive. I mean, who, who gives their spouse permission to go see their lover?” she said.\textsuperscript{330}

Two months later, on February 4, Jenny Sanford released book, \textit{Staying True}, chronicling the affair and the toll it had on her family. As in the \textit{Vogue} piece, Jenny Sanford differentiated herself from other political wives. She explained the thought

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Rucker2009} Rucker 2009, July 1.
\bibitem{Wenger2009} Wenger 2009, September 10.
\bibitem{Wallace2010} Wallace, Thomson and Sher 2010, February 2.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\bibitem{Ibid} Ibid.
\end{thebibliography}
process behind issuing her first statement on the scandal, when Sanford admitted having an extramarital affair in a press conference. She wrote in the book:

I wanted to say something, to respond, to react, even though I knew that was not the usual protocol followed by betrayed political wives. I'd already missed the part in this ritual where I would stand with head bowed next to him in front of hundreds of cameras as he made his shameful admission…I had never considered myself a traditional political spouse, though, and this wasn't the moment to start being one.  

Her clear lack of support for Sanford caused the *New York Times* to describe her as a “poster woman for not standing by her man.”

Jenny Sanford revealed unfavorable details about Sanford in the book. She described how “frugal” he was by telling the story of how one year he gave her a diamond necklace for her birthday, only to take it back the next day. Most damningly for Sanford, who had publicly spoken about his devout faith, Jenny Sanford wrote in her book that he had started to “travel a path of his own making, seeking his own comfort, no longer guided by a power above.”

The news media began viewing Jenny Sanford more cynically after the publication of her book. If she was truly as committed to forgiveness as she claimed to be, then why was she continually bringing attention to the scandal, even months after it had occurred? Far from forgiving Sanford, journalists characterized her as seeking revenge (not unfairly, though, they hastened to add). *Slate* said:

The idea that Jenny Sanford wrote her memoir *Staying True* to mollify her sons, as she told the *New York Times*, is quite comical if you've actually read the book. There is no child who needs to know precisely when and how his father lied to his mother about the mistress in Argentina and how she watched him disintegrate into

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331 Sanford 2010, p. xviii.
332 Brown 2009, November 27.
333 Sanford 179
a pleading, heartsick fool. Sanford's tone is studiously not vengeful, and yet this book is an act of revenge.334

The Los Angeles Times published a review that said, “I believe it was my mother who first admonished me never to presume that ‘you know what really goes on in another person's marriage.’ Well, Mom, meet the Sanfords of South Carolina, whose odd and tumultuous union is now an open book, thanks to ‘Staying True.’”335

The Sanfords’ divorce was finalized on March 18, the day when Sanford also agreed to pay $74,000 in fines to end the ethics commission case against him. The political, legal, and marital ramifications of the scandal were now behind him. His political career was thought to be over by those in the news media, and Sanford himself would have agreed then. As he told a reporter, “I genuinely thought that was it for me in politics, and I don’t think it would take a rocket scientist to come up with that conclusion.”336 At the time of the scandal, Sabato had said, “There has been so much prevarication in this incident that I don't know how Sanford gets his credibility back. I believe he's headed for a nice long career in the private sector.”337

Yet just two years later, Sanford’s fortune reversed remarkably. In 2012, South Carolina senator Jim DeMint resigned, and Governor Nikki Haley appointed Congressman Tim Scott to fill his seat in December. Scott had represented the First District, which also happened to be the same district Sanford had represented when he served a term as a Congressman. The special election held for the seat had a short timespan; party primaries would be held in March 2013 and then the general election would be held in May. As Sanford realized, “the electoral sprint…would favor a

335 Rutten 2010, February 5.
336 Zengerie 2013, March 3.
337 Kropf and Behre 2009, June 25.
candidate who started with high name recognition and deep coffers, and he [had] both.”\textsuperscript{338} Sanford was likely to win the primary, given the other lackluster candidates, and as the GOP candidate, was likely to win the seat, since the First District has not elected a Democrat since 1981.

Sanford did have concerns that the scandal would haunt him in the elections, however. For one, there was speculation that Jenny Sanford would run for the seat herself. After Jenny Sanford decided not to run, there was the possibility that she would try to sabotage his campaign. While Jenny Sanford did not outright endorse or criticize his campaign, her comments to the press made it clear that she was not supportive. She revealed to \textit{New York Magazine} that Sanford had callously asked her to run his campaign, offering to pay her “this time” when she refused.\textsuperscript{339} Her friends told the press, “She’s furious at him for doing this and she doesn’t want him to win, but he’s still the father of her children. Does she want her sons to always think of her as the person who prevented their dad from getting back on his feet?”\textsuperscript{340}

Sanford ultimately won the GOP primary in a runoff election. Jenny Sanford then revealed to the \textit{Washington Post} that the victory party was the first time one of their sons, Bolton, had met Chapur, his father’s fiancé. The \textit{Washington Post} noted that “their son’s discomfort is evident in photos of the event,” which they published with the article.\textsuperscript{341}

\textsuperscript{338} Zengerie 2013, March 3.  
\textsuperscript{339} Zengerie 2013, March 3.  
\textsuperscript{340} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{341} Blake and Tumulty 2013, April 17.
Once Sanford started campaigning for the general elections, Jenny Sanford filed charges against him for trespassing in her home, and thus violating their divorce agreement. The charges were quickly leaked to the news media, and cost Sanford the support of the Republican Congressional Committee, which withdrew their funding for his campaign. Although Jenny Sanford claimed that she had nothing to do with the leak, some journalists found this hard to believe. “Jenny’s not a dope. She’s a savvy political operator, and she had to have known that simply by filing those court documents in the middle of a campaign, there was a very good chance they would eventually leak,” wrote a journalist in New York Magazine.

Despite the rocky campaign, Sanford won the election. As noted earlier, he benefitted from the conservative leanings of the district, particularly when his opponent, Elizabeth Colbert Busch, was liberal comedian Stephen Colbert’s sister. Sanford also capitalized on his political experience with voters, at the expense of Busch, who had never held political office. Sanford explained how his previous congressional service would allow him to “keep his seniority and “jump ahead” of current congressmen who’d served fewer than six years.”

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342 Zengerie 2013, April 17.
343 Ibid.
344 Zengerie 2013, March 3.
Sanford’s engagement to Chapur also redeemed him somewhat from the scandal. Their enduring relationship suggested that he had not just dallied in an affair, but had genuinely been in love. As one of his friends told the press, “Not to make excuses for what he did, but this was different from the Spitzer stuff or the Clinton stuff. It wasn’t the typical politician’s affair kind of scenario.” Sanford also highlighted the fallout from the affair as something that had made him a better candidate. “Unless you’ve felt pain at some level of life, whether it’s self-imposed or otherwise, I don’t think you have the same level of empathy for people who have gone through some level of suffering. I empathize with people at a level that I never did before in part because of some pain in my own life,” he said.

Sanford filed for re-election to Congress in 2014, and no opponents have filed to run against him in the primary or the general elections. His success thus far doesn’t necessarily ensure smooth sailing, though. Jenny Sanford filed court papers in April 2014, accusing Sanford of violating their divorce agreement again. The violation was redacted from the papers, but it appears that it pertains to a real estate dispute. Sanford has managed to rehabilitate his career after the affair, but it appears the scandal will still continue to follow him.

This study examined media coverage starting from Sanford’s admission of the affair (June 24, 2009) to when the legislature voted against impeaching him (December 16, 2009). *The State* and the *Post and Courier* were chosen as the local newspapers. According to fsQCA, the parsimonious solution identifies the portrayal of Jenny Sanford as an activist supporting her husband to be the causal condition for non-negative

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347 Camia 2014, April 14.
coverage. The intermediate solution shows that lack of focus on salaciousness and egregiousness, the portrayal of Jenny Sanford as an activist in support of her husband, and the lack of portrayal of her as an activist against her husband, are consistent with positive coverage.

Figure 38: fsQCA truth table for coverage of the Sanford scandal.
Figure 39: fsQCA complex solution for coverage of the Sanford scandal.

Figure 40: fsQCA parsimonious solution for coverage of the Sanford scandal.
Egregiousness appeared as a factor in many of the sampled articles about Sanford, focusing particularly on the fact that he had left the state without informing his staff of his whereabouts. In the face of a potential crisis or tragedy, the state would have been without a chief executive. They noted that he had left his own family over Father’s Day weekend, and disturbed the holiday for the State Law Enforcement Division, which had been searching frantically for him. Although several articles pointed out Sanford’s hypocrisy in having an extramarital affair when he voted for President Clinton’s impeachment, their focus was primarily on his poor job performance.

The nature of Sanford’s affair both exacerbated and quelled the media’s view on the egregiousness of his actions. On one hand, it was unacceptable that someone would

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Rucker and Roig-Franzia 2009, June 25.
call another woman his soul mate and cry for her publicly, inconsiderate of how that would impact his wife and children. On the other, his strong feelings for Chapur differentiated him from other politicians who had seemingly risked everything for just sex. Sanford’s awkward, rambling speech at the press conference also made him seem more genuine. Said the *Washington Post*:

However rotten Sanford's behavior was, there was something compelling in the raw and messy nature of his confession. Politicians' acknowledgments of infidelity have become set pieces of late, the most recent coming just a week ago when Republican Sen. John Ensign of Nevada made a terse statement that he takes ‘full responsibility for my actions’ -- then refused to take questions. Others, such as former Democratic New York governor Eliot Spitzer and Republican Sen. David Vitter of Louisiana, hauled in their wives to share the shame. Still others, such as Bill Clinton and former GOP senator Larry Craig, substituted accusations for confessions. But this was something entirely different. At a time when every last bit of political life is scripted, here was a powerful man wiping tears from his cheeks and talking about the intimate details of his shameful behavior.\(^{349}\)

Salacious details were not absent from the coverage. The news outlets published the salacious email exchanges between Sanford and Chapur. The *State* had received the emails from a hacker (later revealed to be an angry ex-boyfriend of Chapur’s) a few months before the scandal, but unable to confirm their veracity, they waited to publish them until after Sanford acknowledged the affair. A common excerpt published in the outlets came from an email Sanford sent to Chapur: “You have the ability to give magnificently gentle kisses....I love your tan lines...the curves of your hips, the erotic beauty of you holding yourself...in the faded glow of night’s light.”\(^{350}\)

As for Jenny Sanford’s role, the press considered her to be a new type of wronged political wife. *The Washington Post* said:

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\(^{349}\) Milbank 2009, June 25.  
\(^{350}\) Ibid.
Sanford's reaction to her husband's infidelity purposefully did not follow the post-disclosure postures of Hillary Clinton, Silda Spitzer or Elizabeth Edwards. She emerged as a standard-bearer in the year when CBS debuted *The Good Wife*, a prime-time drama about a cheating politician's spouse who rebounds professionally, rising after his downfall. Sanford blazed a path for an aggrieved spouse of a philandering politician and made herself an unlikely heroine -- a role model, albeit in unwelcome circumstances.\(^{351}\)

The press supported Jenny Sanford for not tolerating his behavior, and empathized with her as Sanford described Chapur as his “soul mate.”

Journalists portrayed Jenny Sanford as an independent and accomplished woman. She had not just been a traditional first lady, but had served as a savvy campaign manager, and then policy advisor, for her ex-husband. The *State* described her as “the power behind the throne.”\(^{352}\) The *New York Times* described how Jenny Sanford “studied data that was sent to the governor’s office and helped develop positions,” quoting a senior legislative staff member who described her as “the real brains behind the operation.”\(^{353}\) Sanford’s former spokesman told the *Washington Post*, “He would have never won either of his governor's races without her -- no way. She ran the show. He pointed the direction he wanted to go, and she was the bulldozer that cleared the path and got him there.”\(^{354}\) After the scandal, reporters believed that Jenny Sanford was now carving out a role for herself. The *New York Times* described how “by separating from her husband, but remaining first lady…she enjoys the perks of political office (a staff assistant, expert advice, ready publicity, admiring colleagues) without the pitfalls (a breakneck schedule of photo-ops and glad handing beside a politically toxic husband).”\(^{355}\)

\(^{351}\) Rucker 2009, December 12.
\(^{352}\) Copeland and Stone 2009, June 25.
\(^{353}\) Davey 2009, June 27.
\(^{354}\) Rucker 2009, June 29.
\(^{355}\) Brown 2009, November 27.
The news media also speculated whether Jenny Sanford would ever start a political career of her own. Although Jenny Sanford did not run in the 2010 elections, journalists claimed that a campaign was likely sometime in the future. A *Washington Post* journalist noted that, “When friends have asked Jenny why, after her divorce, she didn’t begin using her maiden name, Sullivan, she’s told them that she wants to redeem the Sanford name for her sons; many suspect she intends to do this through holding elected office. The main reason she passed on running for Congress this time, according to friends, was that her two younger sons have not yet left for college.”

Sanford received generally negative news coverage. His action were thought to be egregious in that he neglected his job, his salacious emails were published in the press, and not only did his wife leave him, but actively worked against his rehabilitation. Yet Sanford managed to survive the scandal by finishing his term in office, and then winning a seat in Congress, which he is likely to win again in November 2014, since he is running unopposed. He might never escape the scandal, but he has certainly overcome it.

**Edwards and Sanford**

Compared to the Edwards scandal, the Sanford scandal produced proportionally more coverage given the shorter timespan in the national media. At first glance, this appears perplexing, since Edwards was a national political figure, and Sanford was a state elected official. However, the Edwards scandal broke during the 2008 Presidential elections, and was thus overshadowed in an already politically packed news cycle. Edwards further timed the admission of his affair on ABC News to coincide with the

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Beijing Olympic Opening Ceremonies on NBC, in order to downplay the news interest in the story.

The Edwards scandal had also been brewing for a long time; Edwards had admitted the affair about 10 months after the *Enquirer* had broken the story. Sanford’s affair, on the other hand, caught the news media by surprise. Even though he was a local official, the scandal was so intriguing – a foreign mistress, romantic letters, and his disappearance – that it caught national attention. Sanford had an action-packed five months from admitting the affair to being censured and divorced; the developments in the Edwards scandal took three years, making the story more tiresome. There was little time for interest to wane in Sanford’s scandal.

Edwards had more negative articles in his sample (77 percent) compared to Sanford (57 percent). Of the articles that mentioned Jenny Sanford, 87 percent described her as an activist working against her husband, while 13 percent characterized her as an activist working in support of her husband. Of the articles that mentioned Elizabeth Edwards, 89 percent described her as a victim, and 11 percent represented her as an activist working in support for her husband. Both samples included a focus on salaciousness and egregiousness, while only Sanford’s discussed the impact on job performance.

When Sanford’s scandal was revealed, many journalists compared Jenny Sanford to Elizabeth Edwards. Ruth Marcus, a columnist for the *Washington Post*, praised Jenny Sanford’s toughness in comparison to Elizabeth Edward’s example of “spouse-enabling, self-deception and ambition.” However, once Jenny Sanford published her book, reporters wondered why she had stayed so long with a man whom she painted as a “self-

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357 Marcus, Ruth 2009, July 1.
absorbed, pathologically cheap and 360-degrees weird.” As a reporter for Slate noted, “We had a wife who neither stood by her husband's side at the podium (Silda Spitzer) nor issued a bland supportive statement about a ‘stronger marriage’ (Gayle Haggard). This was a woman who met the public straight on because she had concluded, rightly, that his affair was more humiliating to him than it was to her. It's an inspiring image. But this new book complicates the picture.”

Both Jenny Sanford and Elizabeth Edwards spoke to the news media and wrote books about how their husbands’ infidelity had impacted their lives. However, Elizabeth Edwards consistently pointed out Edwards’ redeeming qualities, mainly his support through the death of their son and her illness. That did little to quell the outrage over Edwards’ behavior, though, perhaps because the press believed that she was too vulnerable to come to terms with just how egregious her husband’s behavior was. Jenny Sanford, on the other hand, mentioned unflattering qualities of her husband that were completely unrelated to the scandal. Journalists, in turn, enjoyed her tidbits on Sanford’s behavior, such as how he once gave her a used $25 bicycle for her birthday. However, Jenny Sanford’s frequent disclosures to the media, as well as the publication of her book, also made her appear to be vengeful. She seemed to be capitalizing on the affair to enjoy some time in the spotlight. As discussed in the Clinton chapter, journalists often view events through the game schema. They therefore surmised that rather than being genuine, Jenny Sanford was calculating how she could profit from the scandal – such as running for political office – or how she could seek revenge on Sanford.

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358 Rutten, Tim 2010, February 5.
360 Ibid.
Both Sanford and Edwards managed to avoid legal consequences for their scandals; however, Sanford also rebounded politically, while Edwards’ political career is over. By cheating on his dying wife, and then denying paternity of his daughter, Edwards exacerbated the egregiousness of an extramarital affair. Reporters saw his character as seriously flawed and his actions as unforgivable. Sanford’s rehabilitation was aided greatly by the political context, as the short timespan of the special election favored a well-known candidate who already had existing campaign funds. However, it would be fair to say that Edwards would have likely lost such an election. Sanford’s public pining for his mistress made him seem pathetic; Edwards’ treatment of his wife and child made him seem heartless. One is a lot more forgivable than the other.
Conclusion

This study explored six high-profile political sex scandals that occurred in the last two decades, in order to understand the factors that influenced the tone of the scandal coverage. The first chapter focused on President Bill Clinton’s affair with a White House intern and Congressman Anthony Weiner’s online relationships. The second centered on Governor Eliot Spitzer and Senator David Vitter’s use of escort agencies. The third chapter was on Senator John Edwards’ infidelity to his dying wife and Governor Mark Sanford’s affair with an Argentinian woman. In order to strengthen my conclusions, I used fuzzy set analysis to analyze coverage of all six scandals, to see if there were discernable trends in the coverage as a whole.

Combining the samples provides an even larger number of stories and should highlight the factors that appear important overall. fsQCA revealed that the causal conditions for non-negative news coverage, according to the parsimonious solution, was a lack of emphasis on egregiousness and the portrayal of the wife as an activist. This trend was noted throughout the case studies as well, where lack of focus on egregiousness and/or the portrayal of the wife as an activist were consistent with positive or neutral coverage in five of the six case studies (in the sixth, lack of portrayal of the wife a victim was a factor). Figures 43-46 in the Appendix show the results from the fsQCA analysis with all the articles, and Tables 2 and 3 organize the results in descending order of consistency (the higher the consistency, the better; Ragin suggests that a consistency above .75 is optimal).

The intermediate solution for all the cases shows that a lack of focus on egregiousness and job performance, along with the portrayal of the wife as a supportive
activist, and not a victim or unsupportive activist, contributed to positive or neutral coverage. More simply, salaciousness was not included in the list. On an individual level, however, lack of salaciousness was considered to be a causal condition positive or neutral coverage for all the politicians, except Spitzer.

The consistency scores fall below Ragin’s recommendations in the cases of Vitter, Weiner, and Spitzer. The sample size for Vitter was the smallest, due to the comparatively low visibility of the scandal, which likely contributed to the low consistency. The consistency was also low for Weiner and Spitzer. In these two cases, the lack of consistency is not due to sample size, but to the lack of variance in the dependent variable, i.e. because their coverage was so overwhelmingly negative.

The fsQCA analysis confirms my hypothesis that spousal activism on behalf of the besieged politician is results in non-negative news coverage of the politician caught in a sex scandal. The parsimonious and intermediate solutions for all the articles show that the wife’s activism was consistent with positive coverage overall and holds true on an individual basis for each politician as well. The only exception was Spitzer, but in his case, none of the articles presented Wall Spitzer as an activist. In his case, the analysis showed that lack of portrayal as a victim was consistent with positive or neutral news coverage.

According to the parsimonious solution, spousal support is accompanied by egregiousness in half of the case studies on an individual basis, along with all of the sampled articles. It is logical that these two factors had a strong impact on the coverage of sex scandals. For one, as the wives were seen as the aggrieved parties in the case studies, their husbands’ behavior was egregious in part because of how it had impacted
them. If the wives say that they have forgiven their husbands, then the news media has less incentive to portray him negatively. Secondly, if the husband’s behavior isn’t viewed as egregious, then there is little reason to write a negative article in the first place.

Table 1: The parsimonious solutions from fsQCA analysis for each case study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Sanford</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Clinton</td>
<td>~Egregiousness, Activist</td>
<td>.821429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Cases</td>
<td>Activist, ~Egregiousness</td>
<td>.784722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>.750000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Vitter</td>
<td>Activist</td>
<td>.642857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Weiner</td>
<td>~Egregiousness, Activist</td>
<td>.562500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliot Spitzer</td>
<td>~Victim, ~Job performance</td>
<td>.104167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: The intermediate solutions from fsQCA for each case study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factors</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Sanford</td>
<td>~Egregiousness, ~job performance, ~victim, ~unsupportive activist</td>
<td>.812500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~Job performance, ~salaciousness, ~victim, ~unsupportive activist, activist</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>~Egregiousness, ~job performance, ~victim, ~unsupportive activist, activist</td>
<td>1.000000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Edwards</td>
<td>~Salaciousness, activist, ~victim</td>
<td>.916667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Clinton</td>
<td>~Egregiousness, ~salaciousness, activist, ~victim</td>
<td>.821429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Cases</td>
<td>~Egregiousness, ~Job Performance, ~unsupportive activist, ~victim, Activist Role</td>
<td>.784722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>David Vitter</td>
<td>~Salaciousness, activist role, victim</td>
<td>.696428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Weiner</td>
<td>~Victim, ~egregiousness, ~salaciousness, activist</td>
<td>.562500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliot Spitzer</td>
<td>~Job performance, ~Victim</td>
<td>.104167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stand By Your Man, If You Want the Press to Stand By Him, Too**

While journalists often question why political wives “stand by their men,” this study offers evidence that the strategy does in fact result in more non-negative news
coverage. The word “strategy” here has been chosen here purposely to account for the agency of women who choose to publicly support their husbands in times of scandal. Although “standing by your man” is sometimes associated with submissiveness, the wives profiled here show that this is often not the case. High-profile politicians typically require extensive commitment from their spouses, as the public has come to expect political spouses to participate in their husbands’ campaigns. Political wives therefore invest a great deal of time, and sometimes even money, into their husbands’ campaigns. Sometimes they must give up their own jobs so they can fully focus on advancing their husbands’ careers. Five of the six women – Rodham Clinton, Wall Spitzer, Wendy Vitter, Elizabeth Edwards, and Jenny Sanford – quit their high-profile jobs in law and finance. All of them had a personal investment in their husbands’ careers, extending to roles such as campaign manager or policy advisor, in the case of Rodham Clinton, Wendy Vitter, Elizabeth Edwards and Jenny Sanford. In times of scandal, then, standing up for themselves can often entail protecting that investment.

Table 3: Characterization of wives (percentage of the number of articles that mention the wife)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wife</th>
<th>Supportive Activist</th>
<th>Unsupportive Activist</th>
<th>Victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hillary Rodham Clinton</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Edwards</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jenny Sanford</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silda Wall Spitzer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Vitter</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huma Abedin</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Spousal activism works as a strategy because when the wife downplays her victimization, the press has little reason to present the husband as a persecutor. When Wendy Vitter spoke in defense of her husband at a press conference, journalists noted how strong and powerful she looked in a low-cut, vibrantly patterned dress, standing
taller than her husband in heels. She did not appear to be a victim that anyone needed to feel sorry for. If the wife, perceived to be the main aggrieved party in a sex scandal, is willing to forgive the husband, then the press, and by extension the public, should be able to move on, too. When Abedin spoke to the press about how Weiner was now a changed family man, the New York Times described her as the “crucial character witness” who could vouch for Weiner’s capabilities.\footnote{Grynbaum and Taylor 2013, July 24.} It seems to have helped; before the second round of his scandal occurred, Weiner was leading in the 2013 New York City Democratic mayoral primary. Fifteen years earlier, Rodham Clinton’s fierce defense of Clinton on the Today Show, where she dismissed accusations of adultery as “a vast right-wing conspiracy,” revitalized Clinton’s supporters, and gave him a boost in the polls. As Democratic advisor James Carville told the Washington Post then, “Mrs. Clinton is showing the colors, and we're rallying around the flag.”\footnote{Romano and Merida 1998, January 24.}

Conversely, spousal activism against the husband will also influence the press. Jenny Sanford was the only wife who engaged in this behavior, although she was careful to not outright say that this was the case. By revealing unflattering details about Sanford in interviews and in her book, she ensured the scandal’s longevity. Her disclosures that Sanford had asked her to serve as his campaign manager for his 2013 Congressional campaign, or hadn’t yet introduced his fiancé to all of his sons undercut Sanford’s claim that the scandal had made him a more empathetic person. After filing trespassing charges against him in 2013, she filed court papers in April 2014, charging that Sanford had violated the terms of their divorce agreement again – just as he had filed to run for re-
election in the 2014 midterm elections. The charges both times received national media coverage, and not the kind that Sanford desired.

Sometimes, the wife may try to appear in a supportive role, but the news media still sees her as a victim. Wall Spitzer stood by Spitzer’s side when he apologized for using escort services, but she looked so sad that reporters felt Spitzer had forced her to stand there. The strategy backfired here, as Wall Spitzer’s visible distress made Spitzer seem like a bully. Further, taken literally, “standing by your man” doesn’t seem to be enough. Reporters are so used to seeing spouses at mea culpa press conferences, that they must be convinced that the wife is truly an activist. Some journalists seized on Abedin’s remark that she was “very nervous” as she spoke in defense of Weiner at his press conference. Abedin’s lack of confidence made them sympathize with her, and chastise Weiner for putting her in that position.

He’s Not Worth It

However, the wife’s support isn’t always enough for a politician to receive positive news coverage. Sometimes, the scandal is so far-gone that nothing can help; in other words, the egregiousness trumps everything else. Coverage of Edwards, for example, made remarkably little reference to Elizabeth Edwards’ statements of support for him. Instead, the articles focused on how he had been unfaithful to his terminally ill wife. Abedin’s words of support for Weiner could not help him when the scandal resurfaced in his mayoral campaign. Weiner had continued a behavior that cost him his position in Congress, and then lied about it again while pretending to be a good husband and father. Abedin may have helped him the first time, but second chances can only
happen once. Abedin’s support became a news story of its own, as reporters wondered how she could possibly defend him.

**Egregiousness**

Generally, the sampled articles did not focus on the egregiousness of the sexual behavior so much as the cover-up or the hypocrisy behind it. In times of scandal, reporters were quick to refer to moments in the past when the politicians had spoken of family values or presented the image of a wholesome family. As many of the politicians in this study had criticized Clinton for his affair with Lewinsky, the outlets published their remarks from then when reporting on their scandals. When Sanford admitted to his extramarital affair, reporters reminded the public how he had voted for Clinton’s impeachment. After Vitter admitted using an escort agency, journalists published excerpts from an editorial he had written once Clinton had admitted his affair, demanding that, “some meaningful action must be taken against the president. If none is, his leadership will only further drain any sense of values left to our political culture.”

Headlines on Spitzer’s affair noted how “Mr. Clean,” who had prosecuted prostitution cases as Attorney General, had hired an escort himself.

Being dishonest and trying to cover-up the affair also made reporters consider the scandal more egregious. When Clinton revealed that he did, in fact, have sexual relations with Lewinsky, they called attention to the “finger-wagging performance” a few months earlier when Clinton had denied any sort of improper behavior. Similarly, the news media were incredulous that Weiner had been carrying on his online relationships while also giving interviews proclaiming to be a changed man.

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363 Cillizza 2007, July 16.
Impact on Job Performance

Most of the scandals in this study did not have an impact on job performance, with the exception of Sanford, who disappeared from the state for five days to visit his mistress, and Spitzer, who may have tried to meet with an escort while on state business in Washington, D.C. Considering that their behavior moved the scandal from the personal to the professional realm, I expected to see impact on job performance to influence the tone of the news coverage for Sanford. Although the newspapers discussed at length how Sanford’s disappearance could have put the state at risk, job performance was not a factor in the parsimonious solution of the fsQCA analysis. Perhaps this was because the nature of the scandal did quickly become personal, as Sanford gave emotional interviews about his “soul mate,” and Jenny Sanford moved out of the house. The crumbling of their marriage became the more compelling human-interest story. However, impact on job performance was a causal condition for coverage of the Spitzer scandal.

Salaciousness

The inclusion of local newspapers in this study not only captured local opinion, but also shed light on the different styles of reporting throughout the newspapers. The national newspapers in this study – The New York Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and The Wall Street Journal – were loathe to print salacious details, considering themselves to be respectable outlets. The New York Times only hinted at Lewinsky’s blue dress, describing it as containing Clinton’s DNA, but not explaining why. The Washington Post published an excerpt from Sanford’s email to his mistress, but edited it to remove the most tawdry lines.
However, the popularity of tabloid journalism in New York, in the form of the *New York Daily News* and the *New York Post* heavily disadvantaged Weiner. Those outlets printed full transcripts of his online chats with women, and published headlines containing puns that ridiculed him. The state newspapers in Louisiana and South Carolina also published salacious information on Vitter and Sanford’s scandals, but the tone was more subdued. The New York tabloids were relentless; they found ways to make even non-salacious news tawdry. When Weiner released a book of his policy positions, the *Daily News* headlined their article on the story: “TRYING HARDER: Weiner touts wonk ideas 61 not-so-sexy positions.” Downey and Stanyer’s research shows that tabloidization impacts frequency of sex scandal around the world.

Revealing tawdry details about the politician’s life to the public can undermine his respectability. Weiner’s scandal may have been the least egregious in the study, in the sense that he never had physical contact with any women, but there was so much information available about his sex life that he seemed like a pervert. It certainly didn’t help that most reporters found his penchant for nude photos of himself to be bizarre and disgusting. Polls showed that New York voters found him more embarrassing than Spitzer, who could have actually faced legal ramifications for his behavior.

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365 Durkin and Femino 2013, August 6.  
366 Downey 2013, pp. 495-509.
Does Media Support Actually Help?

The support of the news media can improve a politician’s chances of survival in a sex scandal. After all, journalists do have an influence on public opinion, and their decision to report or not report on a story can create a hostile or welcoming environment for a politician. In the case studies, the politicians that received the most negative news coverage were also the ones that were unable to rehabilitate their careers. It should be noted that this is just an observed trend for these particular politicians; without proper research, it can’t be determined if this holds true for most politicians caught in sex scandals, or whether the negative news coverage is actually diminishing chances of rehabilitation or merely reflecting that the scandal itself is so damaging that the politician has little chance of actually surviving it.

The Importance of the Political Context

While the support of the news media can influence a politician’s survival chances in a sex scandal, the political context can be just as – if not more – important. The

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<td>John Edwards</td>
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<td>Bill Clinton</td>
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<td>David Vitter</td>
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extensive media coverage of the Lewinsky scandal did not diminish support for Clinton, it actually ended up helping him. In fact, Clinton received his highest public approval ratings during the scandal. Believing Clinton to be unfairly besieged by the press and
other politicians, voters flocked to him in a kind of “rally” effect. The economy was doing well and they wanted Clinton to stay in office. Although sex scandals can be career-ending in some cases, it is possible for the politician to survive, particularly if they have the support of the public and their party. According to polling data, Vitter had been the most popular elected official in the state of Louisiana when his scandal broke. Rather than clamoring for his resignation, the public wanted him to continue in office. Vitter was an outspoken opponent of the Affordable Care Act, and the conservative state was more interested in having someone to accurately represent their interests. His Republican colleagues also defended him, likely because the Louisiana Governor was a Democrat who would have appointed a Democratic replacement to the Senate if Vitter had resigned. Spitzer, on the other hand, had low approval ratings before his scandal, and had a reputation for being abrasive with other politicians. Neither voters nor the legislature considered Spitzer’s resignation to be a great loss.

Sometimes, external factors can help politicians facing sex scandals. Sanford wasn’t particularly liked by the public or his party, but they disliked the Lieutenant Governor who would have succeeded him even more. After finishing out his term in office, Sanford then had the opportunity to run for a special election. The short timespan of the election favored a candidate with name-recognition and campaign funds – someone like Sanford. It also helped that his primary opponents were unremarkable, allowing him to easily win the Republican nomination in a conservative-leaning district. Once in the general election, he was able to capitalize on his experience and political views, particularly since his opponent, Elizabeth Colbert Busch had never held elected office and was the sister of well-known liberal comedian Stephen Colbert.
The political context can also influence the media coverage, in dictating what is considered news and what isn’t. The Edwards scandal did not receive as much news coverage as most of the other scandals, and indeed at first, the mainstream media ignored it altogether. Journalists argued that when the scandal broke, Edwards had no chance of winning the Democratic primary, and when it continued, he was neither in elected office nor was he running for a position. Therefore, they felt they had little reason to cover the scandal. In the cases of Spitzer, Clinton, Sanford, and Weiner, newspapers reported extensively on the scandals because they were either in elected office or running for a position. Coverage of the Weiner and Spitzer scandals was also more likely negative than coverage for Edwards because the outlets wrote editorials urging Weiner and Spitzer to drop out or resign from office.

**Future Studies**

The rise of new media has dramatically changed the way that people consume their news. According to data from the Pew Research Center, half of the American public uses the Internet for its main source of news.²⁶⁷ The Internet has impacted scandal-reporting starting with Clinton, in 1998, just as the Internet was starting to become ubiquitous in households. While *Newsweek* was waiting to verify more information before publishing a story on the Lewinsky scandal, *The Drudge Report* scooped the magazine, not feeling the same pressure to fact-check. The starkest example of the divergence between new and traditional media entails the reporting of the Edwards scandal, where the blogosphere pursued the story as the mainstream media ignored it at first. Given the large timespan of this study (from 1998 to 2013), it was difficult to

²⁶⁷ Caumont, Andrea 2013, October 16.
include new media in the sample without compromising the consistency of the study.

Blogs that were popular during Clinton’s time, for example, had become less important by the time Weiner’s scandal occurred. The newspapers provided enduring units of study for the analysis of factors in media coverage. However, online blogs and news aggregators like Slate and Gawker have become an important part of the media landscape, and their coverage must be accounted for in order to have a more complete understanding of scandal reporting. To do this, a future study can examine sex scandals that have occurred in the same time period, to ensure that the media sources are relevant throughout the case studies.
Appendix

Figure 43: fcQCA truth table for coverage of all scandals.

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Figure 44: fcQCA complex solution for coverage of all scandals.
Figure 45: fcQCA parsimonious solution for coverage of all scandals.

Figure 46: fsQCA intermediate solution for coverage of all scandals.
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