



# Political Outsiders and Scandal

## A Comparative Case Study

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## Introduction

**Topic:**  
This topic explores the phenomenon of public figures- turned- politicians and how this may affect the nature of political scandal as we understand it. From Thompson's "Political Scandal: Power and Visibility in the Media Age", we know that scandal involving political actors is distinct from scandals involving other kinds of public figures. The expansion of media in conjunction with new technological capabilities created the idea of "celebrity" and non-political "public figures" as we understand them today; which hadn't been seen before the printing press and the rise of newspaper. To add to this, advanced media technology today has contributed to the evolution of press coverage of public figures and politicians individually, which impacts public opinion and perception of these figures. (2000) With the prevalence of mediated scandal in today's world, it's been observed that people have different attitudes towards political actors embroiled in scandal, perhaps because of their connection to government institutions. From here the question becomes: does the past outsider status of political actors have an effect on the political scandal they may be involved in?

**Outsider status:** an individual who has been in the public eye/ participated in a career that was not directly related to politics; would not be considered a member of the "political elite"  
**Political reputation:** "of one's 'name'-that is, one's standing as a person of honesty, integrity, and good character." (Thompson 2000)

**Thesis:**  
This paper seeks to examine whether there is a causal relationship between the outsider status of political figures and their experience with political scandals. It could be suggested that when they find themselves in scandal, political outsiders experience fewer negative political consequences than political insiders. Evidence for this includes available information on public support for these individual preceding and following the outbreak of scandal, and information on their political career following scandal- did they maintain their position of power? Were they able to recover from the scandal and continue to act in the political field? A comparative study on four political figures in the United States and internationally with perceived outsider status will be conducted to examine whether this relationship is significant.

## Methods

To examine whether there was a casual relationship between the outsider status of politicians and their experience with scandal, this paper involves a normative evaluation of 4 Prime Ministers/ Presidents using the following methods:

**Normative evaluation:** "explicitly concerned with values and what ought to or should be." (Baglione 2012)

- WHO:**
- 1) **Donald J. Trump** (current US president)
  - 2) **Silvio Berlusconi** (former Italian prime minister)
  - 3) **Jair Bolsonaro** (current Brazilian president- elect)
  - 4) **Richard Nixon** (former US president)

- WHAT:**  
For each political figure, this paper identified and evaluated each figures':
- **Insider vs. Outsider status:** does this individual fit the profile of a political insider or outsider? How are they perceived by the public?
  - **Scandals endured while in office:** What scandals did these politicians face? What was the nature of these scandals?
  - **Outcomes/ consequences of scandal:** What were the consequences of this scandal for each politician? What was the response from the public? Were these politicians able to recover from scandal and maintain their political careers and reputations?

- HOW:**  
To make these evaluations, data was collected which included:
- public opinion polls
  - peer reviewed articles on:
    - >political outsiders vs. insiders
    - >the aftermath of major scandals involving these figures
  - academic text on scandal



Jair Bolsonaro

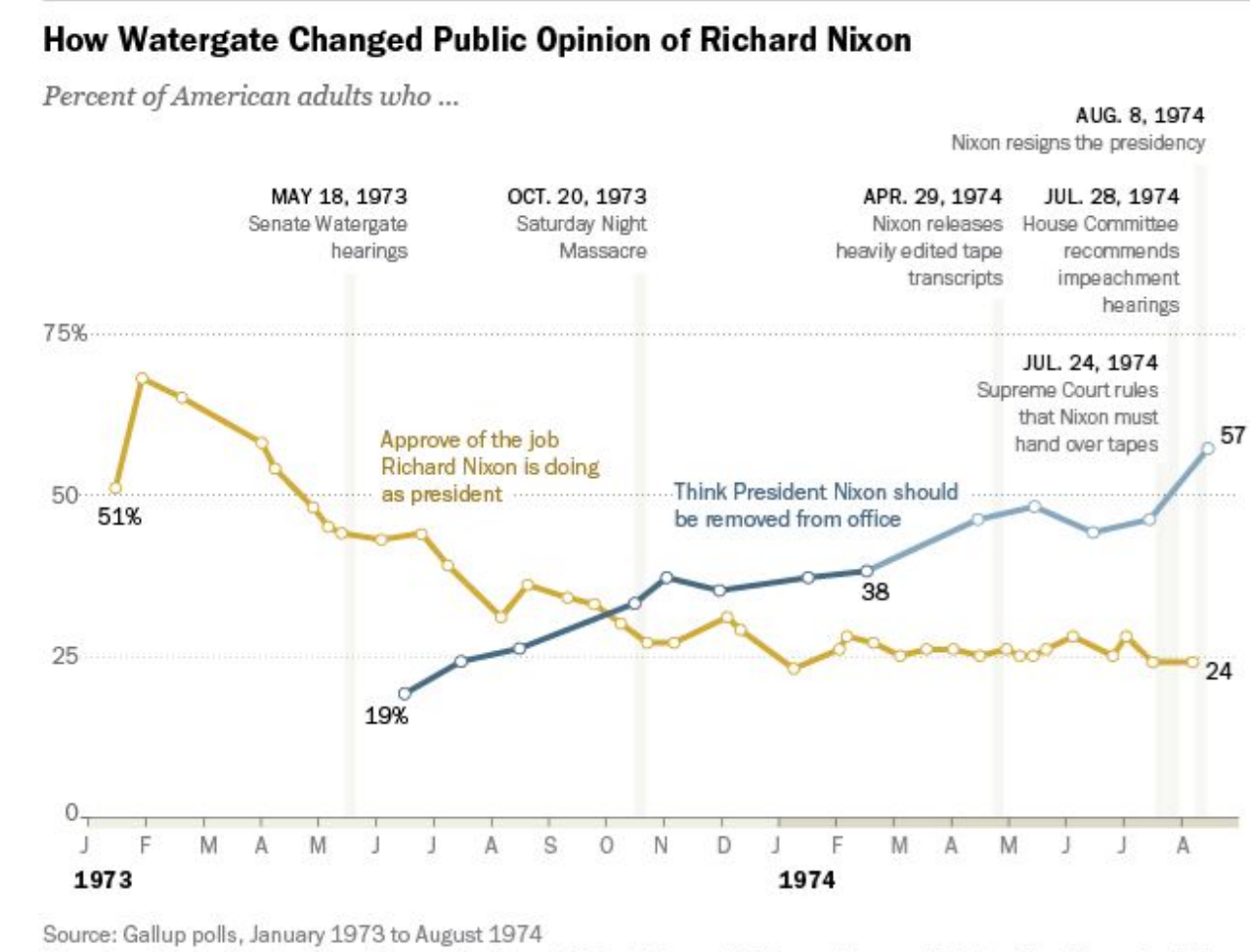
## Results

Available data on public opinion of these figures revealed that:

- Donald Trump ("outsider"):** enjoyed relatively stable public approval ratings, even in the days following the outbreak of major developments in scandals including:
  - >Russian collusion
- Silvio Berlusconi ("outsider"):** had low approval rating as he exited office in 2011 following numerous corruption and sex scandals, but was able to take an early lead in the most recent election
- Jair Bolsonaro (insider with "outsider" status):** saw a boost in public opinion polls despite the outbreak of 'fake news' scandal on Oct. 10, 2018
- Richard Nixon ("insider"):** experienced a significant decrease in favorable public opinion throughout the unfolding of the Watergate scandal

An evaluation of the impact on each figure's political career and reputation revealed that:

- Donald Trump:** in the unfolding of the Russian collusion scandal Trump has avoided impeachment proceedings/ criminal charges **BUT:** arrests have been made/ investigations conducted involving prominent figures in the executive (Desjardins 2018)
- Silvio Berlusconi:** was able to successfully re- enter the political field in the most recent election in Italy, gaining significant momentum and support under the *Legha Nord* or Northern League (Foot 2018)
- Jair Bolsonaro:** despite international public outcry in light of fake news scandal, Bolsonaro secured the Brazilian presidency and enjoys a powerful network of allies in the Brazilian government (Child 2018)
- Richard Nixon:** was forced to resign at the culmination of the Watergate scandal, and was disgraced by the media for years to follow (Kohut 2014)



Retrieved from: Pew Research Center 2014

## Conclusions

**Conclusion:**  
An evaluation of the results in this study supports the thesis that political outsiders experience fewer negative consequences as a result of scandal. It has been found that politicians with perceived "outsider" status, including Donald Trump, Silvio Berlusconi, and Jair Bolsonaro, have not suffered career ending consequences in light of scandal compared to figures like Richard Nixon, who was the only U.S. president to ever resign from office, and subsequently experienced years of public disapprobrium.

**Limitations/ Drawbacks:**  
The scope of the research done in this study is limited because of the lack of data on political outsiders to draw upon. The prevalence of "outsider" politicians is a relatively new phenomenon, and not every political outsider has necessarily found themselves in scandal. In addition, the trajectory of some of these figures, particularly Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro, has yet to be determined- as these both of these individuals have yet to complete a full term in their respective offices.



Silvio Berlusconi (left) and Donald Trump (right)

## Bibliography

(see attachment for full Reference List)

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