



This item was submitted to Loughborough's Institutional Repository (<https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/>) by the author and is made available under the following Creative Commons Licence conditions.

 **creative commons**
C O M M O N S D E E D

Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 2.5

You are free:

- to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work

Under the following conditions:

 **Attribution.** You must attribute the work in the manner specified by the author or licensor.

 **Noncommercial.** You may not use this work for commercial purposes.

 **No Derivative Works.** You may not alter, transform, or build upon this work.

- For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.
- Any of these conditions can be waived if you get permission from the copyright holder.

Your fair use and other rights are in no way affected by the above.

This is a human-readable summary of the [Legal Code \(the full license\)](#).

[Disclaimer](#) 

For the full text of this licence, please go to:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.5/>

Exposing Politicians' Peccadilloes in Comparative Context: Explaining the frequency of political sex scandals in eight democracies using fuzzy set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fsQCA)

Abstract

Political sex scandals are largely absent in some democracies but proliferate in others. However, there have so far been few if any comprehensive attempts to document the actual number of sex scandals that have occurred and to explain their presence (and, indeed, absence) and the one study that has by Barker (1994) ends in the early 1990s and has numerous problems in relation to defining and documenting sex scandals. Based on extensive research this article documents the number of sex scandals in eight advanced industrial democracies and tries to explain their occurrence using of Charles Ragin's fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA). The article has three goals: to determine the number of sex scandals in different democracies, explain why this might be and demonstrate the utility of fuzzy set qualitative case analysis for small and medium-*N* comparative research.

Key Words: Fuzzy sets, Sex Scandals, small and medium-*N* comparative research

Introduction

Studies suggest political sex scandals proliferate in some democracies but are largely absent in others. Research from the US and the UK, for example, shows that some media outlets are only too willing to report all sexual 'indiscretions' by politicians (Sabato *et al.*, 2000; Thompson, 2000; Tumber 2004). This compares to media institutions in other democracies where politicians' sexual peccadilloes are largely ignored. For example, studies of scandal in France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain note the absence of political sex scandals (Chalaby, 2004; Esser and Hartung, 2004; Holtz-Bacha, 2004; Klein, 2000; Merkl, 2001; Cepernich, 2008; Sanders and Canel, 2004; Van Zoonen, 1998). Castells observes that when it comes to political sex scandals the US stands at one extreme with continental European democracies at the other, and the UK somewhere in between (2004). There have so far been few if any academic attempts to document the actual number of sex scandals that have occurred and to explain their presence (and, indeed, absence), and there is certainly no systematic comparative analysis involving these countries (for a general comparison of scandals see Barker, 1994). Existing national case studies while illuminating do not examine the same causal variables and so provide very little sense what political, cultural or media variables may be driving or inhibiting the exposure of sex scandals in different countries.

While the aims of counting and explaining the incidence of political sex scandals across countries are important, we wish also to highlight the usefulness of Charles Ragin's fuzzy set qualitative case analysis (fsQCA) for comparative political communication research (2000, 2008). One of the advantages of this set theoretic approach is it provides a different way of thinking about causation than more conventional qualitative and quantitative approaches, especially for small and medium-*N* comparative research. It is one that takes

account of possible combinations of conditions rather than trying to isolate and assess the discrete effects of variables as in traditional correlatory approaches, and one that moves beyond description which tends to dominate a national case studies approach (see Ragin and Rubinson, 2009).

Sex scandals and their causes

While studies suggest that political scandals are universal in liberal democracies, they also suggest sex scandals involving politicians tend not to be, indicating a sharp division, at least in some countries, between what is considered to be 'public' and 'private' when it comes to sexual matters (see Barker, 1994; Castells, 2004; Garrard and Newell, 2006; Tumber and Waisbord, 2004a, 2004b). However, the exact differences between countries are unknown. There is likely to be variation in the number of instances between the US and the UK or between the US, the UK and the rest, but differences may also exist between other

democracies too. The aim of this study is to explain variation in the number of sex scandals across selected Western democracies from 1990 to 2009. The study focuses on eight countries that are discussed in the literature. Based on case selection and methodology, that will be described below, the authors found a significant variation in the number of sex scandals across these countries, ranging from a high of 45 cases in the US and 34 in the UK to a low of 2 cases in France and 2 in Spain (see Table 1 for more detail).~~The table below shows all *publicised* cases of infidelity involving elected officials while in office from 1990 to 2009 for eight democracies. Infidelity was defined in this research as politicians engaging in sexual relations with actors other than a partner (whether formally married or not) where no criminal offence was alleged or committed.~~

Table 1: Cases of publicised infidelity* involving politicians, 1990-2009

Democracies	Cases of publicised infidelity
United States	45
United Kingdom	34
Australia	10
Germany	4
Netherlands	3
Italy	3
Spain	2
France	2

*Infidelity was defined in this research as politicians engaging in sexual relations with actors other than a partner (whether formally married or not) where no criminal offence was alleged or committed.

The rationale for country selection and data gathering process are explained in more detail later in the article, the point here is to show that there are differences between the US and the UK and between them and the other democracies, especially the continental European democracies. Political sex scandals, as defined above, at least over the sample period, are in the main a feature of the US and UK politics and rare elsewhere.

However, explaining why this is the case presents a challenge. While there is no consensus nationally focused studies put forward a range of possible causes for the presence or absence of sex scandals, these can be grouped in the following way. There are political related variables, such as the greater emphasis on political character in US politics (see Summers, 2007; Thompson, 2000). There are media related variables such as

commercial pressures on the media and the tabloidization of the press in the UK, or the absence tabloidization in France (see Kuhn, 2004, 2007; Tumber, 2004). There is the culture of journalism, which either undermines respect for politicians and their privacy amongst journalists or rather sees the personal as public and political, as in the UK and the US, or separates private and public in matters of sex as in the case of France and Germany (see Thompson, 2000; Kuhn, 2004, 2007; Esser and Hartung, 2004). There are legal variables such as the presence of legal protection for politicians' privacy as in France and Germany (Kuhn, 2004, 2007; Esser and Hartung, 2004) or a growing legalization of political life with new laws of sexual harassment (Thompson, 2000). Finally, there are socio-cultural variables, such as societal norms surrounding sexual behaviour of politicians which might mean infidelity is seen as a private matter or something of public interest (Adut, 2008; Thompson, 2000; Kuhn, 2004, 2007).

However, as these studies are nationally focused there has been no consistent examination of causal variables between countries. Thompson emphasises four plausible causal factors for the presence of political sex scandals in the US. First, a changing culture of journalism. Second, a changing political culture, which has seen a greater emphasis placed on questions of character. Third, a change in societal norms and expectations concerning sexual conduct. Fourth a trend towards the legalization of political life with the introduction of new ethical standards for politicians (2000: 147-148). Kuhn argues the lack of coverage of politicians' private lives in France is the result of three factors (2004, 2007). First, a journalistic culture which regards aspects of politicians' private lives as off limits combined with an absence of a tabloid culture. Second, a societal acceptance that sexual behaviour of public figures is a private matter, and third, legislative constraints that protect the privacy of

public officials. While there is some seeming overlap one crucial variable is not shared namely absence or presence of privacy protection for political elites. The presence or absence of this one factor might be crucial in explaining any outcome across countries but we do not know without systematic investigation. The causes also tend to be rather generally described and do not facilitate comparison. One of the key challenges in political communication research is finding sources of comparative data, we need to know to what extent these causal factors are developed in different countries. Thompson and Kuhn both mention journalistic cultures, but such references are general and need greater specificity, what specifically has changed or remained the same in these cultures?

There are also other factors which are not explored. We argue that one important factor overlooked is the presence or absence of the New Right and social issue conservatism. The New Right, in the US and the UK, has placed personal morality on the political agenda in a way it had not been before (see Petchesky, 1981) and generated a backlash when conservative politicians were found not to practice what they preached. We need not only to be careful in selecting causes in different countries we also need to understand how these causes work together to produce an outcome. While existing nationally focused studies identify a range of causally relevant conditions there is no sense in most of these studies how the causes work together to produce an outcome. Far too often there is merely a list or a description. Descriptions are of limited value in multi-country studies and are inevitably unsystematic. Comparative research requires a systematic attempt to calibrate the influence of each causal condition on the countries under comparison. Descriptions of the importance of journalistic cultures in aiding or preventing an outcome, for example, are not rigorous enough, there needs to be a careful process of

calibration where the importance of each condition can be assessed for each country. In the existing studies there is also no sense of which combinations of causal conditions are sufficient to produce the outcome under exploration in different countries. In addition, there is no sense of whether some causes are more important than others. It is assumed that all causal conditions highlighted are sufficient while it might well be that only some are sufficient enough produce the outcome. The final weakness is that the above descriptive approaches avoid explicit counterfactual reasoning which as we shall see below is essential for thinking about possible plausible outcomes that lack empirical instances. Our existing knowledge about the incidence of sex scandals across democracies calls out for a more systematic comparative approach such as that offered by Ragin's fuzzy set qualitative comparative analysis, which is examined in more detail below (2000, 2008).

Fuzzy sets and Counterfactuals

The basic principle of fsQCA is that it seeks to establish set theoretic relationships between configurations of causal conditions and outcomes. Indeed, Ragin argues that the principle that outcomes are the product of combinations of causally relevant conditions is central to fsQCA (Ragin, 2008: 183). As such it offers an alternative to correlatory thinking, on the one hand, and most similar (or different) systems design, on the other (for a discussion of how fsQCA may be applied to the study of comparative media see Downey and Stanyer, 2010).

The use of fuzzy sets of causal conditions and outcomes is useful in that it recognises the complexity of the social world. Conditions and outcomes are rarely either present or absent: they are rarely 'crisp sets' that can be sorted neatly into 1s and 0s, in other words. If

we take the case of sex scandals, for instance, it is difficult to fit our eight countries into crisp sets. They have all experienced sex scandals yet to a widely diverging degree. Some countries have had only a couple of cases over a period of two decades while others have had tens of cases. There are also countries that are in-between. It would be wrong to force cases to be full members or full non-members or, in other words, to force the data into 'crisp' sets of 0 and 1 either experiencing personalization or not. The use of fuzzy sets allows us to capture some of complexity of the social world.

FsQCA permits us to capture complexity in another way in that it is interested in discovering how causal conditions work together to produce an outcome. Rather than seeing variables as independent it sees conditions as mutually reinforcing. This is essentially an attempt to make more rigorous a common insight from qualitative case studies that often point to causal complexity in their explanations of social phenomena. fsQCA is about finding which causal 'recipes' produce which outcomes with the recipe being understood as the mixture of the ingredients rather than as a collection of their individual properties.

Once we have produced carefully calibrated fuzzy sets for both the outcome (in this case, sex scandals) and suspected causal conditions we can develop a truth table that permits us to compare cases more systematically and allow us to simplify causal conditions when we find 'irrelevancy' of some causal conditions (irrelevant conditions are those whose presence make no difference to the generation of the outcome). This process of simplification is hindered to a considerable extent by the limited diversity of the social world. It is here that the counterfactual reasoning embodied in fsQCA comes into its own (see Ragin, 2008 discussion of counter-factuals).

Research design

This research faced a range of challenges, the first of which was deciding on the number of countries to include in the sample. With no ready existing database of cases political sex scandals each case had to be established through primary research. Practical and financial realities of data gathering across different countries limited the number of countries that could be examined.

The second challenge concerned which countries to include. The sample was deliberately chosen to empirically test the assumptions in the literature about the number of sex scandals in different countries. While such a sampling strategy is unsuitable for wider theory testing it is appropriate given the aims of this study (see Collier and Mahoney, 1996; Geddes, 1990 for a discussion of sample selection). The US and UK, were selected as they are both supposed hot spots for publicised political sex scandals, while France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain were chosen because of their claimed absence of sex scandals. Australia was added as it is often overlooked in comparative research but shares some of the features of the US and the UK even though it is claimed to have few cases of political sex scandals (Tiffen, 1999).

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

The ~~final~~^{second} challenge concerned the selection of political sex scandalsexamples.

The authors used Thompson's definition of political sex scandals to determine which cases to select. ~~As mentioned earlier-~~ The research focused on one type of sex scandal namely breaches of 'prevailing norms or codes governing the conduct of sexual relations' which do not constitute ~~a~~ criminal acts in themselves -but are seen as ~~a~~ significant breaches of a moral code (Thompson, 2000: 120). The authors documented all *publicised* cases of infidelity involving elected officials while in office from 1990 to 2009. All cases of infidelity that

feature in this article were sourced over a three year period ~~(A full list of cases can be supplied by the authors on request)~~. The cases were gleaned from a number of sources in part because it was found that no one source was entirely comprehensive either across countries or over time and because it was important to corroborate each case. The first source was First, newspaper and magazine articles from the eight countries in the study which were accessible via the Nexis UK data base, these included: *El Pais, the New York Times, the Washington Post, the Times, the Independent, the Guardian, La Stampa, Suddeutsche Zeitung, De Spiegel, De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, the Age*. The number and choice of newspapers reflects their availability on Nexis UK over the period in study. For each search a range of specially selected words were used in combination ~~for a numbers searches~~. These words included: politicians, politics, sex scandal, affair, divorce. The words were translated to the relevant language where appropriate. The articles were then read by the authors and research assistant fluent in these languages to see if the identified cases matched the definition mentioned earlier. The second source examined was books, articles and special features in newspapers, magazines and online concerned with political scandals (see for example Adut, 2008; Bingham, 2009; Connolly, 2009; Cepernich, 2008; Esser and Hartung, 2004; Kuhn, 2004; Parris and Maguire, 2005; the Spectator, 2009; Tiffen, 1999; Wolcott, 2007). Finally, to ensure that cases were not overlooked and further corroborate existing cases we turned to country experts, namely political scientists/ communication scientists based in those countries who have published on this topic or are interested in it. The use of experts also helped overcome the potential limitations of the other sources by providing examples for us to follow-up. The use of experts is gaining increased purchase in the social sciences (see Benoit and Laver, 2006). Second, special features in newspapers, magazines and news websites concerned with political scandals (see for example in the US,

Connolly, 2009; for the UK see: the *Spectator's* Top 50 Political Scandals part one and part two, 2009; Wolcott, 2007). Some web-only news outlets also carried special features on sex scandals (see for example the *Daily Beast*, and the *Huffington Post*). Third, books and articles about political scandals were also a fruitful source of cases, especially Adut, 2008; Kuhn, 2004; Bingham, 2009; Parris and Maguire, 2005. Finally, academic colleagues, whose knowledge of the national politics of individual countries was useful to help identify and clarify cases. Gathering continued until the additional number of cases gathered reached zero.

The final challenge concerned which countries to include. The research was influenced by what has gone before. The US and UK, both supposed hot spots for publicised political sex scandals, as were France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Spain notable for their absence sex scandals according to the literature. Australia was added as it is often overlooked in comparative research but is suggested to have some of the features of the Anglo-American democracies (Jones and Pusey, 2010). The sample included countries with and without privacy protection for politicians, where the New Right was present and absent, and democracies where there were variations in the presence of tabloid media, variations in the extent to which the media were politically aligned, and variations in the level to which voters strongly identified with political parties.

Publicised infidelity and its causes: calibrating fuzzy set membership

Before we can use fsQCA to determine the outcome we need to work out the fuzzy set membership scores for the democracies in table 1. Drawing on Ragin (2000, 2008) we can

use the above findings to determine membership of the fuzzy set we call: *democracies where politicians' infidelity is highly publicised*. Any set will have full members and full non-members, but more likely than not, it will also have partial members or partial non-members. The authors used a six value fuzzy set with each democracy being allocated a membership score according to the number of publicised cases of marital infidelity: 1= full membership of the set, 0= full non-membership, 0.8= mostly but not fully in, 0.6= more or less in, 0.4= more or less out, 0.2= mostly but not fully out. The first step in calibrating membership scores is to establish the divide between membership and non-membership (Ragin, 2000, 2008). This crossover point was established by the authors at 10 or one case every two years. In other words, a political sex scandal every other year on average was deemed to be the minimum for set membership. Anything more than 10 cases and publicised infidelity was deemed to be a significant feature of national political life anything less it was not. The authors set the threshold for full membership at 40, at least two cases per year or more; for mostly but not fully in, between 20 and 39 cases; for more or less in, a minimum of a case every other year but no more than 19. The threshold for full non-membership was set at 0, that is no cases at all over the period; for more or less out at 5 to 9 cases; and for mostly but not fully out, at 1 to 4 cases (see the table above).

Table 12: Cases of publicised infidelity involving politicians and fuzzy set membership scores

Democracies	Cases of publicised infidelity	6 value Fuzzy set membership of set of countries with publicised marital infidelity
United States	45	1
United Kingdom	34	0.8
Australia	10	0.6
Germany	4	0.2
Netherlands	3	0.2
Italy	3	0.2
Spain	2	0.2
France	2	0.2

Causal conditions

Having allocated membership scores for the fuzzy set *democracies where politicians' infidelity is highly publicised* – the outcome we want to explain - the authors then wanted to explore the causal conditions that generate the outcome (and indeed the negation of the outcome i.e. which causal conditions explain the absence of publicised infidelity). As noted, existing research on political sex scandals suggests that there are a range of possible causal conditions which can be grouped into political, media, legal and socio-cultural factors. Focusing on these areas the authors concentrated on what they saw as the most likely causal conditions, which were not necessarily identical to the ones raised in previous research. One of the key conditions that might explain the frequency of revelations is the absence of laws which protect the privacy of those in public life. In France, Germany, Italy and Spain privacy laws are a major constraint on media reporting the private lives of politicians (Bueno et al., 2007; Holtz-Bacha, 2004; Klein, 2000, Trouille, 2000; Whitman, 2004). In Australia, the UK and the US while public figures can use the civil law to protect their privacy there are no formal privacy statutes. In other words, in countries where there is weak privacy protection exposure of infidelity is more likely. Another important condition in helping explain the outcome is likely to be the extent to which a democracy has an established tabloid media sector. Research in media studies shows that countries with an established and growing tabloid media outlets are more likely to see intrusion into politicians' private lives on a regular basis (see Stanyer and Wring, 2004). In the US tabloid exposés some studies suggest are fairly common (Sabato et al., 2000). There are numerous recent examples of the tabloid press exposing the extramarital sex lives of politicians. One

recent of more example concerns Democrat presidential hopeful John Edwards whose extramarital affair was exposed in the *National Enquirer* in 2008. In the UK, tabloids seem prepared to go to any lengths to get personal information on public figures, as the recent phone-hacking revelations have shown. They regularly pay to obtain private information, whether from a member of the public or private investigator. The size of the tabloid sector in each country, with its focus on celebrities' personal lives, guarantees that it is important for the flow of such material.

A further condition likely condition is the extent to which different media institutions within the media system are partisanly aligned. Intensely partisan media might be more keen to expose the sexual peccadilloes of their political opponents for partisan gain than media that have weaker party ties and where levels of 'neutral' professionalism are strongest (see Lowi, 2004). The levels of political parallelism in the different countries might help explain the differing degree of exposure.

In addition to the media related conditions further possible condition is the presence of the New Right and social issue conservatism in politics. The 1980s saw the election of right wing governments in the UK and the US. Both pursued policies of economic liberalisation, argued for a reduction in the size of the state and emphasized the importance of individual economic self-reliance, and both were profoundly conservative on social issues. This conservatism can be seen in the championing of the traditional pro-family initiatives, and in the opposition to many of the social reforms of the 1960s, such as on abortion and the relaxation of divorce laws (Eisenstein, 1982). For some, the New right has become synonymous with such social conservatism (see Petchesky, 1981). One of the consequences of this was the moral behaviour of New Right politicians especially their adherence to the

norms governing sexual conduct became an important political issue. There was a growing focus on the personal lives of those that place personal morality at the heart of their political values.

The final condition that the authors think might have an impact on the outcome is the importance voter-audience's attach to a politicians' character. If a candidate's personal qualities are an important factor shaping electoral choice and support then it is logical to assume that there will be incentives for office seekers to attack a rival's character. While there is no comprehensive data set on personal voting patterns there is data on the level of party identification amongst voters. Low and declining levels of party identification might mean other factors, such as the personal qualities of those being elected, are important in determining the outcome of elections. Indeed, studies have shown that candidate's personal qualities are an important factor shaping electoral choice and support not only in presidential systems (see Miller et al., 1986) but also in parliamentary systems, where the character of party leaders is seen as an important determiner of voter choice (Clarke et al., 2004).

As mentioned one of the strengths of the fuzzy set approach is that it allows the exploration of complex combinations of causal conditions. So, for example, a key causal condition for membership, as identified by others, might be membership of the set of democracies with privacy protection for public figures. This might be a key causal condition but, of course, it may only be significant if countries are also full or partial members of the set of democracies with a large tabloid media sector and a partisanly aligned press. It might also be that having a vigorous tabloid media sector combined with low party identification amongst voters will be sufficient for a country to be a full member without the presence of

the New Right, a partisanly aligned press or privacy protection. To emphasize, it is different combinations of conditions working together that is the significant factor here not discrete net effects of one. Different combinations might also lead to the same outcome.

Calibration

In order to produce a truth table that generates the necessary causal recipes each countries membership of the causal conditions outlined above needs to be calibrated (see Ragin, 2008). Due to the nature of the data available the authors engaged in a qualitative assessment of the degree of set membership based on case oriented evaluations of the available evidence from the secondary literature. This approach involved an initial sorting of cases, the assignment of preliminary set membership scores to each case based on these secondary sources (see Ragin, 2008). One of the ~~strong points strengths~~ of the fuzzy sets approach is that it allows calibration of set membership according to theoretical and substantive knowledge. This of course is fundamentally interpretive but this is one ~~of its~~ strengths ~~of the method~~ (see Ragin, 2000: 166). Membership of each causal subset was calibrated drawing on general resource books as well as a range of nationally focused articles and book chapters. What follows is a description of the calibration process for each of the chosen conditions.

Membership of the first set '*weak statutory protection of private lives*' was established with data from Bueno et al., 2007; Holtz-Bacha, 2004; Klein, 2000; [Shackelford, 2011](#); Trouille, 2000; Whitman, 2004. A four value fuzzy set was used. Countries were full

members if public figures had no statutory protection of privacy or recourse to the law, more in than out if they had no statutory protection of privacy but could use other legal avenues, full non-members if public figures had statutory protection of privacy and recourse to other legal means and more out than in, if they had statutory protection of privacy but the recourse to other legal means was more limited.

To gauge membership to the set '*large tabloid media sector*' the study used data from World Press Trends 2008 on newspapers and magazines around the world supplemented with data drawn from national case studies (see Sparks and Tulloch, 2000; Tumber, 2004). A four value fuzzy set was used. Countries were considered full members if they had 8 or more tabloid outlets and there was evidence of a robust tabloid media, full non-members if there were 1 or fewer tabloid outlets, and the cross over point was set at 4.

To measure membership of the set '*democracies with high levels of press-party parallelism and broadcast-party parallelism*' the study drew on research from Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Jones and Pusey, (2010). The model of neutral professionalism is perhaps weakest in Italy where the Italian press often take an 'activist role mobilising their readers to support political causes and participate in political events' (2004, p. 103). In Spain and France, levels of professional neutrality are somewhat higher. In Spain, Hallin and Mancini note that the influence of US model of neutral professionalism has been great, while in France, this model has been 'embraced' but has not displaced a tradition of commentary (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). In Germany the press very rarely identifies with a single political party and tends not to openly campaign for political parties during election campaigns. Hallin and Mancini observe that papers avoid presenting a univocal political tendency reflecting a wide spectrum of political views. In the Netherlands in contrast

newspapers tend to be especially critical of parties whose political stance diverges from their own on the left-right spectrum. In the US, the principle of journalistic neutrality is strong. In the UK, political parallelism is relatively strong especially at election times (Hallin and Mancini, 2004), similarly in Australia where the press tends to be vocal in support for the main political parties (Jones and Pusey, 2010). Drawing this evidence the authors gave each country the following scores based on a four value fuzzy set. It considered Italy a full member, Australia, the UK and France more in than out, Germany and Spain more out than in and the US fully out.

The authors drew on a range of nationally focused articles and book chapters to calibrate membership of the set '*democracies where the New Right has a presence in politics*'. The criteria for membership was set at whether the each country had a New Right government that adopted socially conservative policies in the last thirty years. A six value fuzzy set was used. France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain were considered full non-members, as none had experienced a government with New Right social conservative policies. This is not to suggest that certain political parties are not social conservative in outlook but that the New Right was not a political force in the way it has been say in the US and the UK and personal morality not a contentious political issue. The US was considered a full member in part because it had conservative Republican presidential administrations for the 22 of the 30 years between 1980 and 2009, but also because of because of the broad grouping of activists and politicians at the state and national level that espouse a conservative stance on social issues as part of their political platform. The socially conservative agenda can be seen in the policies of George W Bush and the stance of Republican politicians in Congress on the liberalization of abortion laws and same sex

marriage. The UK was considered more or less in. It had Conservative governments that adopted a fairly socially conservative agenda for 17 of the 30 years between 1980 and 2009. The policies and rhetoric of the Thatcher and Major governments criticised feckless welfare dependent loan parents and absent fathers who passed their responsibilities on to the state. Thatcher government sought to prevent what they saw as the promotion of homosexual relationships (Waites, 2000). The Major government established the Child Support Agency to recover the cost of child care from absent parents. However, we argue that while social conservatism remained an important force in US politics under the presidency of George W Bush, it has weakened in the UK with the election of the Blair government in 1997. Australia was considered more or less out in part because it has a government that adopted socially conservative stance on moral issues for 11 of the 30 years between 1980 and 2009. However, while the Howard government adopted a socially conservative stance on many social issues, such as on euthanasia and same sex marriage, his social conservatism was perhaps not as overt as in the US and his government tended to avoid interference in these policy areas which were responsibility of individual states (Hollander, 2008).

Finally, membership of the set '*Low and declining levels of party identification*' was based on evidence was drawn from data provided by Plasser with Plasser, 2002 and supplemented by information from Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Schmitt and Holmberg, 1995. A four value fuzzy set was used. Countries were considered full members of if 90% of those surveyed did not identify with a political party, full non-members if 10% or less identified and the cross over point was set at 50% of the population (see table below for membership scores).

Table 23: Truth Table displaying the causal conditions for membership of fuzzy set 'democracies where politicians' infidelity is publicised'

	Publicised infidelity (PI)*	Low Party Identity (LPI)	Level of Tabloidisation (TAB)	Weak Privacy protection (WPP)	Politically aligned press (PAP)	New Right (NR)
Australia	0.6	0.7	0.3	.7	.7	0.4
France	0.2	0.7	0	0	.7	0
Germany	0.2	0.3	0.7	0	.3	0
Italy	0.2	0.3	0.3	0	1	0
Netherlands	0.2	0.7	0.3	0	0.3	0
Spain	0.2	0.3	0.7	0	0.3	0
UK	0.8	0.7	1	.7	.7	0.6
US	1	0.7	1	.7	0	0.8

*the outcome

Explaining sex scandals

FsQCA allows the exploration of the negation of the outcome as well as the outcome, to explain why some countries do not have a media culture of publicised infidelity (pi) as well as explaining why some do (PI). (The presence of the outcome and causal conditions is represented by upper case letters and the absence by lower case letters.) Potentially the explanations of the outcome and the negation of the outcome are asymmetrical and it is standard practice using fsQCA to investigate both. Also it is possible that there are different causal recipes or paths that generate both the outcome and negation of the outcome. The truth table above (Table 3) was analyzed using fsQCA software freely available at:

www.u.arizona.edu/~cragin/fsQCA/. The authors followed the standard analysis advocated by Ragin (Ragin, 2008: 142-4).

Table 34: The causal recipes that generate both the outcome and negation of the outcome

PI (presence of publicised infidelity)	pi (absence of publicised infidelity)
<i>Complex solutions</i>	
NR*LPI*TAB*WPP	nr*LPI*tab*wpp
nr*LPI*tab*WPP*PAP	nr*tab*wpp*PAP
	nr* pi*TAB*wpp*pap
<i>Parsimonious solution</i>	
WPP	wpp
<i>Intermediate solutions</i>	
PAP*WPP*LPI	wpp*tab*nr
WPP*TAB*LPI*NR	pap*wpp* pi*nr

Note: The presence of the causal conditions is represented by upper case letters and the absence by lower case letters

The complex solutions for both the presence and absence of the outcome reveal the limited degree of simplification that can be attained using only empirical cases and not including remainders. There is some simplification (for example, in countries with the presence of the New Right (NR), weak privacy protection (WPP), low party identity (LPI), and a high degree of tabloidization (TAB) whether the press is party aligned (PAP) or not is irrelevant to the outcome) but not much.

The most parsimonious solutions (permitting all remainders or counterfactuals) points to the central importance of the degree of legal privacy protection. Where privacy protection is strong there are few cases of publicised infidelity and where it is weak there

are more and other causal conditions are irrelevant. While the presence or absence of privacy protection is obviously important we should, however, be wary of considering it as the only causal condition to explain the frequency of publicised infidelity. Other research reveals that the UK and the US had low levels of publicised infidelity in the 1960s and 1970s comparable to those in continental Europe (see Bingham, 2009; Ross, 1988), despite low levels of privacy protection. If lack of privacy protection were a sufficient cause of publicised infidelity this would not have been the case. It would appear then that weak privacy protection is a necessary but not a sufficient condition of for a high level of publicised infidelity.

This points to the importance, following Ragin, of considering intermediate solutions (i.e. allowing remainders only when they conform to our knowledge of cases). If we consider the intermediate solutions we find that there are two causal recipes that explain the presence and two the absence of publicised infidelity. Recipe WPP*TAB*LPI*NR explains the exposure of politicians infidelity in the UK and the US. In both countries the personal qualities of office holders and office seekers are seen as important factors in a political environment where party loyalty and identification are low and declining, especially in the US (LPI). This is combined with a weak privacy protection for politicians (WPP). Politicians in the US and UK do not enjoy the statutory privacy protection of politicians in continental European democracies (Shackelford, 2011). The tabloid media have particularly benefitted from the absence of such restrictions. The tabloid media sector is a bigger feature of the UK and US media systems when compared to the continental European democracies and driven by a need to boost ratings the tabloids have been able to increase their market share by 'digging dirt' on those in public life (TAB). Politicians are seen as fair game and reporting

their sexual misdemeanours as a service for voters (Paterno, 1997; Sabato, et al., 2000). These factors combined in the 1990s with a further factor, the presence of socially conservative New Right politicians (NR). It is the way these factors combined that deserves more attention. In both countries moralizing on family values by conservative politicians, who were not practising what they preached, led to a backlash amongst journalists and the media. In 1993, in the UK, the then Conservative Prime Minister, John Major, in his speech to the annual Conservative party conference launched the Back to Basics campaign with a call for a re-entrenchment of family values in society (Jones, 1995). For the press generally, and the tabloid press in particular such moralizing about family values was suspect given that it was widely known that certain ministers were conducting extra-marital affairs. Indeed, the Heritage Minister David Mellor's affair with actress Antonia de Sancha had played out in the press the year before. Major's 1993 speech, together with his government's policy proposals, acted as a catalyst for a series of further exposés of the extramarital sex lives of Conservative government ministers and MPs. The *Sun*, in one of its editorials, argued that the press had every right to publish stories about politician's infidelity, after all, voters based their judgements on the public image of MPs, 'that's why so many politicians include happy family photos on their election literature. And that's why MPs don't like the press spilling the beans when they're caught not practising what they preach' (Jones, 1995, p. 5). In total, between 1993 and 1997 when the Major government left office, the infidelity of 5 government ministers and 7 MPs was exposed. In 1998, in the US, it was the activities of conservative Representatives on the Republican right who had had, or were engaging in, extramarital affairs while openly seeking to impeach President Clinton for his philandering that led to a raft of exposés. Republican representatives Bob Barr, Dan Burton, Helen Chenoweth, Henry Hyde, Bob Livingston were all subject to

newspaper revelations about their private lives (see Berke, 1998; Davis, 2006). The exposure of hypocritical socially conservative politicians has continued. In a survey of US editors' news room policies, while only 39 per cent said they would disclose a candidate's extramarital affair, that figure rose to 84 per cent of editors if the politician was a family-values candidate (cited in Riffe, 2003, p. 100). In the last year of this study, 2009, the extra marital affairs of two leading conservative politicians, South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford and Nevada Senator John Ensign were revealed in the national media. These followed on from revelations of infidelity by Mississippi Representative Chip Pickering, Louisiana Senator David Vitter and Washington State Assembly member Richard Curtis in 2007.

Recipe PAP*WPP*LPI explains the outcome in Australia and the UK. In this recipe there is still weak privacy protection (WPP) and the personal qualities of office holders and office seekers are seen as important (LPI), but the moralizing of the New Right is absent. As noted the Howard government's social conservatism was not as overt as in the US or that of Major government in the UK and the Blair government that was elected in 1997 in the UK could in no way be seen as socially conservative. However, both countries witnessed a further exposure. In both countries as noted political parallelism is relatively strong and the press are highly vocal adversaries of governments that do not share their partisan colour especially when they are in office. In the UK after an initial honeymoon the Conservative leaning press was hostile toward the Blair government. The extramarital antics of Robin Cook, David Blunkett, Ron Davies, and John Prescott were all reported in the Anti-Blair press. In Australia the situation is some what complicated by the federal nature of politics. But here again the exposures were the result of a press partisanly opposed and hostile toward those in office. In 2009, New South Wales Labor Health Minister John Della Bosca

resigned after the conservative leaning *Daily Telegraph* revealed he had a six-month extramarital affair.

The absence of exposure of marital infidelity also requires more detailed explanation. The first recipe (wpp*tab*nr) explains the absence exposure in France, Italy and the Netherlands. As noted there has been no New Right social conservative moralizing in government or by a substantial section of politicians. There is not a large number of competitive tabloid media which incentivises exposes, and even if there was, public figures have statutory privacy protection which would curtail any intrusive excesses. The second recipe (pap*wpp*|pi*nr) explains the absence of cases in Germany and Spain. Here too there is an absence social conservative moralizing in politics and strong privacy protection. This combines with a situation where model of neutral professionalism dominates the media and levels and party identification levels are high meaning the personal qualities of office holder and seekers are less important to voters. Although there is a visible tabloid press, it is not on the scale of the US and UK, and it is not enough to lead to higher levels of exposure.

Conclusion

While it is important to bear in mind the limitations in what can be inferred about sex scandals from this small-N study, this article importantly moves their examination beyond nationally focused descriptions to explain their incidence in eight different countries in a systematic comparative way. It has shown that the advantage of fsQCA for comparative analysis that tends to be based on small-N case studies is that it brings greater rigor and

Formatted: Don't adjust right indent when grid is defined, Space After: 0 pt, Don't adjust space between Latin and Asian text, Don't adjust space between Asian text and numbers

sophistication to the process of explanation through the calibration of fuzzy sets and the use of counterfactual reasoning. ~~Existing nationally focused studies have failed to empirically determine the number of sex scandals that have occurred in different countries, have only suggested a range of possible causal conditions and have not explained how these conditions might work together to produced an outcome (Thompson, 2000; Kuhn, 2004, 2007; Esser and Hartung, 2004).~~ This study by calculating the number of cases of publicised infidelity in different countries, by calibrating fuzzy sets, and by analysing the resulting truth tables has determined that there is no single magic-bullet cause rather two causal recipes or paths to both the presence and absence of publicised infidelity in different democracies.

The degree of privacy protection ~~is appears to be a~~ necessary central causal condition in explaining both absence and presence, however, it is not ~~sufficient on its own~~ the only relevant condition; it is rather part of two different configurations ~~of causal conditions~~ that explain why politicians' infidelity is publicised in Australia, the UK and the US and much less so in the other democracies.

References

Adut, A. 2008: *On Scandal: Moral Disturbances in Society, Politics and Art*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Barker, A. 1994: The Upturned Stone: Political Scandals and Their Investigation Processes in Twenty Democracies. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 21, (4) 337-373.

Benoit, K. and Laver, W. 2006: *Party Policy in Modern Democracies*. London: Routledge.

Formatted: Don't adjust right indent when grid is defined, Space After: 0 pt, Don't adjust space between Latin and Asian text, Don't adjust space between Asian text and numbers

Berke, R L. 1998: The 1998 Campaign: Commercials; Gleeeful Democrats Assail Ads by GOP on Clinton Scandal. *New York Times*, 29 October. <http://www.nytimes.com/> (Accessed 1.7.10)

Bingham, A. 2009: *Family Newspapers? Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press, 19-18-1978*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bueno, M., Cardenas, M L. and Esquivias, L. 2007: The Rise of the Gossip Press in Spain. *Journalism Studies*, 8 (4):621-633.

Cepernich, C. 2008: Landscapes of Immorality: Scandals in the Italian Press (1998-2006). *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 9(1): 95-109.

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

Clarke, D. H., Sanders, D., Stewart, M. and Whiteley, P. (2004) *Political Choice in Britain*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Collier, D. and Mahoney, J. (1996) Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research. *World Politics*, 49(1): 56-91.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Connolly, K. 2009: Sex Scandals Through the Years: Both Parties Even. *Newsweek*, 25 June. <http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/thegaggle/> (Accessed 09.7.09).

Dalton, R J. and Wattenberg, M P. (2000) (eds) *Parties Without Partisans: Political Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Davis, L. 2006: *Scandal: How Gotcha Politics is Destroying America*. New York: Palgrave.

Downey, J. and Stanyer, J. 2010: Comparative Media Analysis: Why some fuzzy thinking might help. *European Journal of Communication* 25: 331–47.

Eisenstein, Z R. 1982: The Sexual Politics of the New Right: Understanding the 'crisis of Liberalism' for the 1980s. *Signs*, 7 (3): 567-588.

Esser, F. and Hartung, U. 2004: Nazis Pollution, and No Sex: Political Scandals as a reflection of Political Culture in Germany. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47(8): 1040-1071.

Garrard, J. and Newell, J. (eds) (2006) *Scandals in Past and Contemporary Politics*.

Manchester: Manchester University Press.

[Geddes, B. \(1990\) How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics. In Stimson, J A. \(ed\), *Political Analysis*, vol. 2. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.](#)

Formatted: Don't adjust right indent when grid is defined, Space After: 0 pt, Don't adjust space between Latin and Asian text, Don't adjust space between Asian text and numbers

Hallin, D C. and Mancini, P. (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Henningham, J. 1998: Australian Journalists. In Weaver, D H. (ed) *The Global Journalist: News People Around the World*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Holtz-Bacha, C. 2004: Germany: How the Private Life of Politicians Got into the Media. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 57 (1): 41-52.

Hollander, J. 2008: John Howard, Economic Liberalism, Social Conservatism, and Australian Federalism. *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, 54 (1): 85-103.

The Independent (1995) Sleaze: the List. *The Independent*, 23 July, <http://www.Independent.co.uk> (Accessed 4.2.10).

Jones, N. 1995: *Soundbites and Spin Doctors: How Politicians Manipulate the Media and Vice Versa*. London: Cassell.

Jones, P K. and Pusey, M. (2010) Political Communication and Media System: the Australian Canary. *Media Culture and Society*, 32(3): 451-471.

Klein, U. (2000) Tabloidized Political Coverage in the German Bild-Zeitung. In Sparks, C and Tulloch, J. (eds) *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards*. Lanham MD: Rowman and Littlefield

Lowi, T J. (2004) Power and Corruption: Political Competition and the Scandal Market. In Apsotolidis, P. and Williams, J A. (eds) *Public Affairs: Politics in the Age of Sex Scandals*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press

Merkel, P H. (2001) *A Coup Attempt in Washington: A European Mirror on the 1998-1999 Constitutional Crisis*. New York: Palgrave

Miller, A H., Wattenberg, M P. and Malunchuk, O. (1986) 'Schematic Assessment of Presidential Candidates', *American Political Science Review*, 80, 521-540.

Norris, P. and Inglehart, R. (2004) *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Parris, M. and Maguire, K. 2005: *Great Parliamentary Scandals: Five Centuries of Calumny, Smear and Innuendo*. London: Robson Books.

Paterno, S. 1997: An Affair to Ignore: Why did a story about Bob Dole's dalliance get so little play? *American Journalism Review*, 19, January-February.

- Plasser, F with Plasser, G. (2002) *Global Political Campaigning: A World-Wide Analysis of Campaign Professionals and their Practices*. Westport,CT: Praeger.
- Petchesky, R P. 1981: Antiabortion, Antifeminism, and the Rise of the New Right. *Feminist Studies*, 7(2): 206-246.
- Ragin, C. (2000) *Fuzzy Set Social Science*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ragin, C. (2006) The Limitations of Net Effects Thinking. In Rihoux, B. and Grimm, H M. (eds) *Innovative Comparative Methods for Policy Analysis: Beyond the Quantitative Qualitative Divide*. New York: Springer.
- Ragin, C. (2008) *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ragin, C. and Rubinson, C. (2009) The Distinctiveness of Comparative Research. In Landman, T. and Robinson, N. (eds) *The Sage Handbook of Comparative Politics*. London: Sage.
- Riffe, D. 2003: Public Opinion About News Coverage of Leaders' Private Lives. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 18 (2): 98–110.
- Ross, S. (1988) *Fall from Grace: Sex, Scandal and Corruption in American Politics from 1702 to the Present*. New York: Ballantine Books
- Rudin, K. 1998: Congressional Sex Scandals in History. *Washington Post*, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/> (accessed 15.05.09)
- Sabato, L J., Stencel, M. and Lichter, S R. (2000) *Peepshow: Media and Politics in an Age of Scandal*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Sanders, K. and Canel M J. (2004) Spanish Politicians and the Media: Controlled Visibility and Soap Opera Politics. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 57 (1): 196-208.

Schmitt, H. and Holmberg, S. (1995) Political Parties in Decline? In Klingemann, H-D. and Fuchs, D. (eds) *Citizens and the State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sparks, C. and Tulloch, J. (2000) (eds) *Tabloid Tales: Global Debates Over Media Standards*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Spectator, 2009a: Top 50 Political Scandals: Part One, 8 July, *The Spectator*,

<http://www.spectator.co.uk> (Accessed 5.2.10)

Spectator, 2009b: Top 50 Political Scandals: Part Two, 16 July, *The Spectator*,

<http://www.spectator.co.uk> (Accessed 5.2.10)

Shackelford. S J. 2011: *Fragile Merchandise: A Comparative Analysis of the Privacy Rights for Public Figures*. ExpressO. http://works.bepress.com/scott_shackelford/9 (Accessed 4.10.11)

Stanyer, J. and Wring, D. (2004) Public Images, Private Lives: An Introduction. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 57 (1): 1-8.

Summers, J H. 2007 [2000]: What Happened to Sex Scandals? Politics and Peccadilloes, Jefferson to Kennedy. In Negrine, N. and Stanyer, J. (eds) *The Political Communication Reader*. London: Routledge.

Thompson, J B. 2000: *Political Scandal*. Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Tiffen, R. 1999: *Scandals: Media, Politics and Corruption in Contemporary Australia*. Sydney:

University of New South Wales Press

Trouille, H. 2000: Private Life and Public Image: Privacy Legislation in France. *International Comparative Law*, 49 (1): 199-208.

Tumber, H. 2004: Scandal and the Media in the United Kingdom. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47 (8): 1122-1137.

Tumber, H. and Waisbord, S R. 2004a: Introduction: Political Scandals and Media Across Democracies, Volume 1. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47 (8): 1031-1039.

Tumber, H. and Waisbord, S R. 2004b: Introduction: Political Scandals and Media Across Democracies, Volume 2. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47 (9): 1143-1152.

Van Zoonen, L. (1998) The Ethics of Making Private Life Public. In Brants, K., Hermes, J. and Van Zoonen, L. (eds) *The Media in Question: Popular Cultures and Public Interests*. London: Sage.

Waites, M. (2000) Homosexuality and the New Right: The Legacy of the 1980s for New Delineations of Homophobia. *Sociological Research Online*, 5 (1), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/1/waites.html>

Whitman, J Q. 2004: Two Cultures of Privacy: Dignity versus Liberty. *Yale Law Journal*, 113: 1153-1196

Winter, A. 2000: The 'New' Right: Definition, Identification, Differentiation. *Sociological Research Online*, 5 (1) <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/5/1/winter.html>

World Press Trends 2008

Wolcott, J. 2007: Why are British Sex Scandals So Much Better than Ours. *Vanity Fair*, February. <http://www.vanityfair.com> (Accessed, 02.11.07).

