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Abstract

Do politicians perceive scandals differently when they implicate members of their own party rather than another party? We address this question using a between-subject survey experiment, whereby we randomly assign UK local councilors (N=2133) to vignettes describing a major national-level scandal in their *own* party versus *another* party. Our results show that local politicians perceive a significantly larger impact of this national scandal on the *national* party image when it concerns their own party (relative to another party). When evaluating the same scandal's impact on the *local* party image, however, no similar treatment effect is observed. This suggests that local politicians tone down the local impact of a national scandal more when thinking about their own party. We suggest this derives from a form of motivated reasoning whereby politicians selectively focus on information offering a more negative view of their direct electoral opponents. These findings arise independent of the type of scandal under consideration.

Keywords: Scandal, Partisanship, Political Accountability, survey experiment.

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1. Introduction

Scandals triggered by politicians' inappropriate, unethical or illegal behavior can invoke responses from *voters* (Vivyan et al., 2012; De Vries and Solaz, 2017; Fisman and Golden, 2017) as well as the involved *politicians* (Peters and Welch, 1980; Ferraz and Finan, 2008; Cavalcanti et al., 2018). Previous studies largely leave aside the assessment of such events by a third group of actors: i.e., politicians *not* personally involved in the scandal (for a recent exception, see Daniele et al., 2020). Yet, large-scale scandals generally implicate only a fraction of active politicians, and they have been observed to cause or exacerbate internal divisions within political parties (Kam, 2009; Plescia et al., 2020). This raises important questions about how politicians 'on the sidelines' of a scandal – including, for instance, party leaders (Asquer et al., 2020) – perceives the impact of such events, and whether these perceptions are affected by politicians' partisan affiliation. In this article, we address this research gap by asking: Do politicians perceive a scandal differently when it implicates members of their own party rather than another party? Answering this question allows further insight into the extent to which politicians' partisan ties induce party-motivated reasoning in favor of their in-group (Taber and Lodge, 2006), as well as the potential role of politicians' electoral self-interest in this process. Politicians' perceptions of scandals may also have broader relevance since they might trigger actions that impact upon intra-party stability by intensifying internal party divisions (Kam, 2009; Plescia et al., 2020).

Our analysis starts from the observation that political parties play a key role in the life of politicians. They act as gatekeepers to elected office (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Fiva and Røhr, 2018; Heyndels and Kuehnhanss, 2020), determine who is promoted to positions of political power (Dowding and Dumont, 2008), and a party's name and/or symbols provide a low-cost heuristic to voters during elections (Kam, 2005; Conroy-Krutz et al., 2016). The latter aspect, however, can come with an important downside when a scandal hits a party. The party name and insignia may then bring up negative associations to voters, which imposes electoral costs upon *all* politicians within the party (Desposato and Scheiner, 2008; Lupu, 2014; Asquer et al., 2020; Daniele et al., 2020). This, we argue, has implications for the way politicians may perceive scandals occurring in different parties. On the one hand, a scandal in my *own* party reflects poorly on me, and may taint me with some degree of 'guilt by association' (Goffman, 1963; Kvåle and Murdoch, 2020). This leads to the expectation that politicians in general might perceive a scandal within their own party as more injurious to the party's image. On the other hand, politicians' loyalty to their own party may trigger motivated reasoning (Taber and Lodge, 2006), which could cause politicians to view scandals in their own party as less injurious to their party's image. The balance of these

opposing effects is not a priori clear and is the subject of our empirical investigation. Nonetheless, we maintain that this balance will be affected by whether or not politicians evaluate the impact of a scandal in relation to their own electoral arena. Due to a closer geographic proximity to my own voters, my own political activities and my own personal network, thinking about a scandal in relation to my own electoral arena makes it very personal and direct. This increases the incentive to engage in motivated reasoning (Taber and Lodge, 2006; Lodge and Taber, 2013), and leads to the prediction that a scandal's injurious effect on my own party's image is moderated when considering my own electoral arena.

To assess these theoretical propositions, we set up a survey experiment with UK local Councilors (N=2133; fielded in October/November 2018). Specifically, we randomly allocated respondents to vignettes describing a hypothetical scandal involving national politicians in their own party or another party (between-subject design). We subsequently measured respondents' perception of the impact of this scandal on the involved party's image at the national level (where the scandal occurred) as well as the local level (where our respondents are politically active). Our main results show strong and consistent evidence that politicians interpret scandals through party-colored lenses. Specifically, scandals in politicians' own party on average trigger a *larger* perceived negative impact on the party image relative to scandals in other parties. This arises independent of scandal type. Furthermore, we find that this own-party bias in the perception of a scandal lessens when examining politicians' own level of government. This is consistent with the idea that politicians' assessment of a scandal's (negative) impact is moderated by considerations related to their electoral self-interest.

Our study offers four main contributions to the literature. First, we are the first experimental study dealing with the role of parties for politicians' (rather than voters') perception of scandals. Some recent work has started addressing similar questions using observational data (e.g., Daniele et al., 2020). Yet, experimental evidence allows stronger causal inferences, which provides a step forward on this largely overlooked issue within the research on scandals. Second, studying how politicians respond to scandals involving their fellow partisans provides novel insights into intra-party dynamics. Previous research has shown that scandals may exacerbate internal party divisions (Plescia et al., 2020), and can be exploited as a pretext to gain power and/or control of the party organization, or to oust demanding colleagues (Kam, 2009). We posit that such effects are more likely to arise when politicians on the sidelines of a scandal perceive the behaviour of their peers to be more damaging to the image of their party.

Third, our findings increase our understanding of how partisanship may bias politicians' perceptions of specific situations. Norris and Lovenduski (2004), among many others, have argued that individuals' partisan ties lead to 'selective perceptions' (Zaller, 1992; Lodge and Taber, 2013). Studies by Christensen et al. (2018) and Bækgaard et al. (2019) illustrate that this holds for politicians as well as for voters. However, to the best of our knowledge, we are the first to show that politicians' re-election motivation can play a moderating role for this influence of partisanship. Politicians' (electoral) self-interest thus may work to mitigate the impact of parties on politicians in modern politics. This not only shines a new light on the role and relevance of political parties (Aldrich, 1995; Snyder and Ting, 2002), but also raises important new questions about when and why the balance between party- and self-interest tilts one way or the other.

Finally, our analysis does not address politicians' likely *actions* following a scandal (e.g., exploiting the situation to accuse opponents, or to win favours within the party). Yet, we argue that analysing (the determinants of) politicians' perceptions is important in itself, as it provides information about a key driver behind their actions and decision-making. Psychological research has indeed established a direct connection between perceptions, decisions and actions (e.g., Fazio, 1990) and views individuals' perceptions as an important link in the decision-making chain (Oliveira et al. 2009). This literature has also motivated political scientists to view perceptions as an important subject of analysis, since perceptions "define which rules, duties and obligations are relevant as well as the type of utilitarian interests at stake" (Herrmann and Shannon, 2001, p. 625; Kelley and Mirer, 1974). Hence, showing that politicians' perceptions of scandals are affected by their partisan ties provides critical evidence on the first step in a causal chain towards the decision-making of politicians – the later stages of which naturally require further analysis to yield additional insights into mechanisms behind political outcomes.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

When receiving new information, people engage in cognitive processes and strategies for "accessing, constructing and evaluating beliefs" (Kunda, 1990, p. 480). The theory of *motivated reasoning* maintains that motivation plays an important part in guiding these cognitive processes, which can lead to biased information processing in favour of some arguments rather than others (Kunda, 1990; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Bækgaard et al., 2019). Such "reliance on a biased set of cognitive processes" (Kunda, 1990, p. 480) constitutes a widely accepted psychological account of individual-level information processing and has been documented in a vast academic literature

spanning numerous fields and settings. In political science, several scholars have argued that partisanship presents a key determinant for “the direction of bias in motivated reasoning” (Slothuus and De Vreese, 2010, p. 633; Jerit and Barabas, 2012; Blais et al., 2016). Such *partisan motivated reasoning* arises when individuals are motivated to “perceive real world conditions in a manner that credits their own party” (Bisgaard, 2015, p. 849). People interpret information “through the lens of their party commitment” (Bolsen et al., 2014, p. 235), and uncritically accept elements favorable to their party while devaluing contrary indications (Taber and Lodge, 2006; Slothuus and De Vreese, 2010; Bolsen et al., 2014). By thus seeking out (dismissing) information that confirms (contradicts) their political predispositions, partisan motivated reasoning allows people to form and maintain beliefs consistent with their party identification.

In the literature studying the electoral implications of scandals (for reviews, see Fisman and Golden, 2017; De Vries and Solaz, 2017), the role of partisanship and partisan motivated reasoning has been discussed as a moderating factor. Voters’ partisan motivated reasoning is expected to reduce their propensity to punish corrupt co-partisan politicians. Much of the empirical literature testing this hypothesis relies on field, lab and survey experiments. It finds substantial evidence showing that partisanship moderates voters’ propensity to judge and/or punish corrupt or scandal-marred politicians (Anduiza et al., 2013; Klačnja and Tucker, 2013; Solaz et al., 2019; Agerberg, 2020), thus confirming similar results from observational studies (Anderson and Tverdova, 2003; Eggers, 2014; Chang and Kerr, 2017). Yet, such findings are not universal. Konstantinidis and Xezonakis (2013), Winters and Weitz-Shapiro (2013) and Chauchard et al. (2019) find little to no effect of partisanship on assessments of corruptive practices in survey experiments in Greece, Brazil and India, respectively. Klačnja et al. (2020, p. 8) even find that participants in survey experiments in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay were “on average more likely to punish co-partisan corrupt candidates” – though they suggest that these results may derive from weak partisan attachments in the studied countries.

Clearly, however, political parties not only matter to voters. They play a central role also for politicians (Aldrich, 1995; Snyder and Ting, 2002). One reason is that political parties generally hold a firm grip on who runs under the party banner during elections (Gallagher and Marsh, 1988; Fiva and Røhr, 2018; Asquer et al., 2020; Heyndels and Kuehnhanss, 2020). Moreover, politicians rely on the party hierarchy to advance their political career and obtain positions of political power (Dowding and Dumont, 2008; Borchert and Stolz, 2011). Such career and patronage concerns benefit in-group attachment and dependence by creating an “informal exchange relationship in

which a patron offers benefits in return for the (...) allegiance of a client” (Chang and Kerr, 2017: p.70). Extensive research furthermore indicates that the vast majority of politicians in established democracies rarely switch between parties (O’Brien and Shomer, 2013; Cirone et al., 2020; Daniele et al., 2020; Fiva et al., 2020). This reflects a high level of in-group loyalty and identification, which is an important precondition for partisan motivated reasoning.

From a theoretical perspective, the way in which motivated reasoning affects politicians’ scandal perceptions is ambiguous *ex ante*. On the one hand, the importance of parties to politicians might make them particularly prone to motivated reasoning *benefiting* their political in-group. In our setting, this could become reflected in a belief that one’s own party is better able to handle any fallout from the revelation of a scandal (compared to other parties). Politicians may also argue that supporters from their party are *less* scandal averse than supporters of other parties (at least when it comes to scandals in their preferred party; Anduiza et al., 2013; Klačnjna and Tucker, 2013; Solaz et al., 2019; Agerberg, 2020), or that accusations against their own party are *less* likely to be true, important or effective. Each of these mechanisms would lead politicians engaging in motivated reasoning to perceive a scandal as *less* injurious to the party image when the scandal relates to their own party.¹

On the other hand, politicians’ motivated reasoning may also lead them to perceive the impact of scandals within their own party *more* negatively compared to another party. This is due to two reasons. First, politicians may realize that a scandal has a direct and immediate impact on their own electoral prospects when the scandal concerns their party. The reason is that any reduction in a party brand’s electoral value (Desposato and Scheiner, 2008; Lupu, 2014) as well as its ethical and non-policy reputation (Asquer et al., 2020) may cause voters to punish other politicians running under the damaged party label. That is, if my co-partisans do something wrong, this makes me look bad too. Such electoral considerations can be expected to take center-stage in the (directional) goals guiding politicians’ cognitive processes. Second, politicians may not only interpret scandals that effectively occurred through party-colored lenses, but also the probability of such events *prior to* their actual occurrence. The reason is that in-group attachment affects individuals’ priors and beliefs about how people of that group are likely to behave, what type of opinions they hold, their policy positions, and so on (Lodge and Hamill, 1986; Dancey and

¹ Other mechanisms could be relevant as well, and our data will, unfortunately, not allow us to adjudicate among them. While we consider it of prime interest to first establish the presence and direction of any partisan bias in politicians’ perception of scandals, future research should engage in more in-depth analysis of these underlying mechanisms.

Sheagley, 2013). Motivated reasoning thus may lead politicians to view their own party as less prone to scandals, while over-estimating the likelihood that other parties' members violate legal, ethical or normative boundaries. This is important because expectancy violation theory (Smith et al., 2005) argues that individuals' reactions to bad outcomes are more negative when they expected something good rather than something bad. Relative to politicians' prior beliefs, the occurrence of a scandal in one's own ("clean") party would appear particularly unexpected and damaging, whereas it will have a smaller marginal impact for another ("bad") party.

These opposing predictions can be summarized as follows.

Hypothesis 1a: Politicians perceive a political scandal as *less* injurious to the party image when the scandal is related to their own party.

Hypothesis 1b: Politicians perceive a political scandal as *more* injurious to the party image when the scandal relates to their own party.

A scandal's damage to the party brand may not remain contained at the level of government where the scandal occurs. In effect, the impact of scandals often spills over across levels of government, particularly in the case of highly salient scandals that grab the public (and media) attention (Chang et al., 2010; Asquer et al. 2020). Research showing stronger evidence for top-down compared to bottom-up coattail effects (Campbell and Sumners, 1990; Mondak and McCurley, 1994) suggests that such spillovers will be most likely to occur in a top-down fashion: i.e. a national scandal's negative electoral implications at the local level. This highlights that a scandal's electoral implications may be a cause for concern for *all* co-partisans, regardless of their level of government. Nonetheless, the geographic proximity of local politicians to their voters may counteract such spillover effects due to a 'friends-and-neighbourhoods' effect. According to this framework, politicians receive disproportionate support near their residence and/or birthplace; Meredith, 2013; Fiva and Halse, 2016) due to local canvassing, campaigning and networks (Johnston et al. 2016). We argue that any such localism may lead politicians to perceive scandals as *less* injurious when thinking about their own electoral arena. Specifically, it leads them to (selectively) downgrade any threat of the scandal to themselves, which induces a relatively more harmful view scandals for their direct electoral opponents. This argument leads to our second hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: Any difference in politicians' perception of a scandal in their own or another party (see Hypotheses 1a/b) is mitigated when their assessment relates to their own (local) level of government.

3. Experimental design and data

3.1 Experimental design

Figure 1 illustrates our experimental design. We randomly assigned respondents to one of six treatment groups, which were divided into two segments. In the first segment, respondents were asked to imagine the occurrence of a major scandal involving several politicians from their *own* party. In the second segment, the scandal instead involved several politicians from a *different* party. For both segments, we developed three vignettes varying in the type of scandal: i.e. a generic undefined scandal (our 'baseline' treatment), a financial scandal, and a moral scandal. These scandal types are commonly differentiated in the literature (Pujas and Rhodes, 1999; Sarmiento-Mirwaldt et al., 2014), and are most frequently observed in reality (Basinger, 2012). We introduce this variation in scandal types for two reasons. On the one hand, it addresses that our baseline treatment provides no control over the scandal(s) respondents have in mind while answering the survey. The treatments with specific scandals guide respondents' thoughts and thus allow more control. On the other hand, varying the scandal types provides an opportunity to verify robustness of our results across scandal types.

The vignettes for the baseline treatment were phrased as follows:

The last few years have witnessed several scandals, which raised questions about the ethics and integrity of the politicians involved. Imagine that a major scandal breaks out in the year before the local authority elections, which involves several national politicians from [your party] [another party active in your local authority].

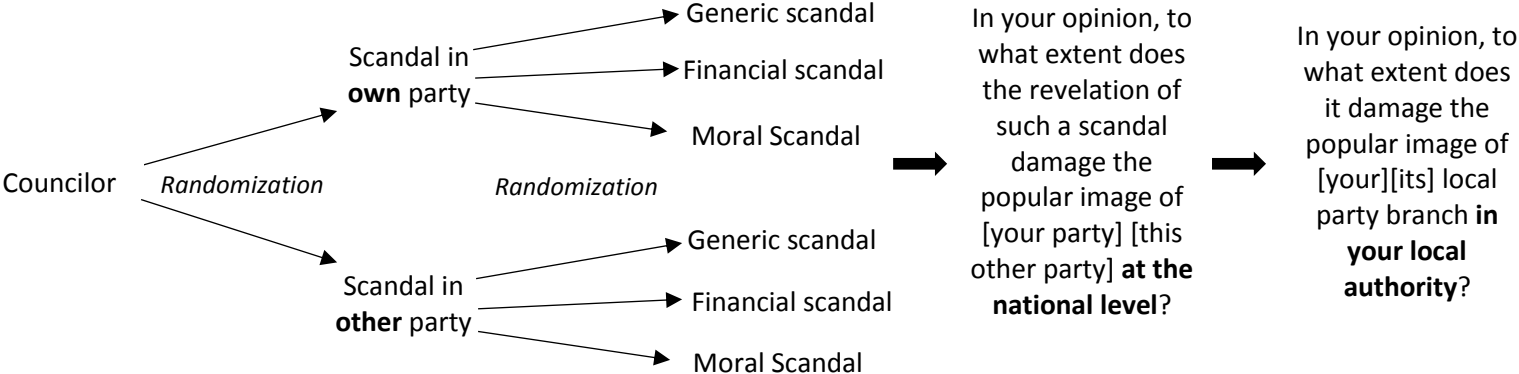
The vignettes for the other scandal types were identical, except for the inclusion of an example at the end of the first sentence. For the 'financial' treatment, we added: "e.g., the 'cash for laws' scandal or abuse of parliamentary expenses". For the 'moral' scandal, we added: "e.g., with respect to sexually transgressive or inappropriate behaviour (#Metoo)". Numerous instances exist in recent UK parliamentary history for both types of scandals, including the 2006-07 'Life Peerages' scandal, the 2009 'cash for laws' scandal as well as several sexual harassment complaints brought forward in 2017 in the wake of the #Metoo movement. As such, they are credible and recognizable to our respondents, which benefits the internal validity of our design.

Observe that we deliberately abstain from mentioning party names in our vignette since this may trigger party-specific effects. Even so, our examples might invoke certain parties linked more closely to a specific scandal. We consider this a minor concern as members of both main parties were involved in the parliamentary expenses and #Metoo scandals. Nonetheless, we acknowledge that there is a clear trade-off here because one might worry that our respondents internalized the treatment more when referring to their own party, while paying less attention in the (less precise) ‘other’ party treatment. It is a priori unclear whether including/avoiding specific party names is superior, and future research may want to specify in- and out-group treatments with specific party names to assess this trade-off directly.

After these vignettes, we asked respondents for their perception of how this scandal influences the image of the affected party at the national as well as the local level. The former was phrased as: “In your opinion, to what extent does the revelation of such a scandal damage the popular image of [your party] [this other party] **at the national level?**” The latter was phrased as: “In your opinion, to what extent does it damage the image of [your][its] local party branch **in your local authority?**” In both cases, responses were recorded on a seven-point scale ranging from “not at all” (1) to “very much” (7).² The vignettes and subsequent questions were pre-tested among employees at two universities (one each in Belgium and Norway). The pre-test covered individuals with experience in survey experiments (to obtain feedback on the experimental design) as well as native English speakers (to ensure language clarity and precision). We did not include UK nationals in our pre-test since our experimental design does not exploit the (very complicated) particularities of the UK institutional setting.

² We extensively debated the randomization of our question order. While randomizing the sequence of these questions would avoid potential bias due to order effects, it may also introduce bias by violating the natural order of asking about the *national* impact of a *national*-level scandal before asking about its *local* impact (which could signal importance or intent to respondents). On balance, we decided to keep the question order fixed across respondents. Importantly, this still allows us to assess differences in responses between the national and local questions observed *across the own-other party treatments* (Hypothesis 2). Any such differences observed in the data cannot be due to question order effects since *all* respondents received the same question order independent of the partisan treatment.

Figure 1: Experimental design



Note: Each individual councilor was randomly allocated to the own/other party treatment (with equal probability) and to treatments differing in scandal type (with equal probability). Respondents first saw the vignette relevant to their treatment, and subsequently were asked two questions about the impact of this national-level scandal on a party’s popular image at the national and local government level (in that order).

3.2 Institutional setting and data

The survey was fielded in October/November 2018 among UK local Councilors. The local level of government in the UK is highly complex due to its varying arrangements both within and across the four regions (i.e. England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales). Nonetheless, local councilors always face direct election for their position, and local governments' functions and powers generally include economic, social and environmental policies as well as council tax collection. A more restricted set of functions exist in Northern Ireland. Most important for our purpose, the vast majority of local councilors is member of – and stands in local elections for – a party that is also active at the national level of government (91.6% of our respondents). This creates partisan connections between subsets of politicians across levels of government, and allows analyzing how local politicians perceive and interpret a national-level scandal in their own party versus another party.

We invited all 20,391 UK local Councilors with publicly available email addresses (provided by Commercial Evaluations Ltd.) to participate in our survey. As 223 email addresses proved inactive and 460 individuals held multiple offices, we effectively contacted 19,708 individual Councilors. The survey went online on 11 October 2018 and was closed on 30 November 2018, with three reminders sent in roughly two-week intervals. We received 2118 complete responses, 1207 incomplete answers and 880 individuals 'opted out'. Hence, response rate is 21.3% when including any form of response, and 10.8% when counting only complete responses. The bottom panel of Table 1 provides summary statistics of respondents' background characteristics. These indicate that 71% are male, 65% have at least some form of university education, and 28% hold an executive position in the local council (such as (deputy) mayor, or (deputy) leader of the council). The average age is just under 60 years, and on average respondents are in their third term in office. Using information from the 2013 *Census of Local Authority Councilors* and the population of contacted councilors, we find that our sample is broadly representative in terms of age (i.e. mean as well as distribution), gender, terms in office as well as region. Respondents are skewed towards Labour and LibDem councilors and away from Conservative councilors (details in Table B.3 in the Online Appendix).³ Given our focus on the role of partisanship, throughout the analysis we exclude

³ This skewness by political party does not affect the internal validity of our results since treatments were randomly allocated (and this random allocation was successful across party members; see below). It may, of course, limit external validity and our findings' generalizability to the overall population of UK councilors.

politicians identifying as ‘Independent’ or failing to report a party affiliation (6% of respondents).

Table 1: Summary statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	St.Dev.	Min.	Max.
<i>Dependent variables</i>					
National Image	2133	5.196	1.442	1	7
Local Image	2122	4.483	1.590	1	7
<i>Background characteristics</i>					
Male	1815	0.708	0.455	0	1
Age	1868	59.584	13.179	20	100
University	1913	0.650	0.477	0	1
Executive	1951	0.278	0.448	0	1
Terms	1874	3.369	2.504	1	14
England	1914	0.836	0.370	0	1
Labour	2326	0.393	0.489	0	1
Conservative	2326	0.335	0.472	0	1
Liberal Democrat	2326	0.154	0.361	0	1

Note: The table shows summary statistics for our dependent variables – i.e. the perceived impact of a scandal on a party’s national/local image (see question formulation in main text) – and key background characteristics. The number of observations differs across variables since party membership was the first question of the survey, while other background characteristics were asked at the end of the survey. The sample under analysis excludes individuals that do not profess any partisan affiliation. ‘University’ equals 1 for respondents with at least some university-level education. ‘Executive’ is a dummy variable equal to 1 for respondents holding a position of power in the local council (such as (deputy) mayor, (deputy) leader of the council, or cabinet member). ‘Terms’ refers to the number of legislative periods (usually lasting four years) a respondent has started including the current one. ‘England’ is a dummy variable equal to 1 for respondents holding office in an English county.

The top panel of Table 1 includes summary statistics for our dependent variables, which measure politicians’ perception of the scandal’s impact on the image of the affected party (see above). The mean is above the midpoint of the scale for both the national and local party image question. This indicates that UK local councilors generally feel that the revelation of a national-level scandal would be damaging to the popular image of the involved party at the national level (5.2 on a 7-point scale) as well as at the local level (4.5 on a 7-point scale). Naturally, the impact is perceived to be substantially and statistically significantly larger at the national level – where the scandal arises. Yet, considerable spillover effects are felt to exist for the local branch of the involved party, even though there is no suggestion that any local politicians are implicated.

Clearly, responses to survey questions dealing with sensitive or controversial topics (such as scandals) may at least partially reflect socially desirable answers. Self-reported measures obtained from politicians may also be “suspect given the electoral self-interest embodied in [their] claims” (Lovenduski and Norris, 2003, p. 86). Yet, it is not a priori clear whether self-serving politicians would declare higher concerns about a scandal in their own party (e.g., to signal personal rectitude), or rather downplay own-party scandals (e.g., to divert attention). Moreover, random allocation of respondents to our treatments should make it equally likely that respondents with high/low levels of susceptibility to social desirability end up in our various treatment groups.

The validity of our research design requires random assignment of respondents across treatments. We assess this by estimating logit models with binary dependent variables for our various treatments (i.e. scandal in own/another party, and scandals of distinct types). Explanatory variables include respondents’ age, gender (1 if male), education level (1 if university degree), number of terms in office, party affiliation (i.e. dummies for Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats; reference group covers all other parties), political position (1 for politicians holding an executive position), region (1 if England) and size of Local Authority (using a four-point ordinal scale). The Likelihood-Ratio-tests from these regressions indicate that respondents’ observable characteristics are jointly insignificant at conventional levels (Table B.1 in the Online Appendix). Still, these results also highlight that university-educated respondents were somewhat less likely to have received the own-party treatment and older respondents somewhat more likely to have received the financial scandal treatment (Table B.2 in the Online Appendix confirms this using Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests). We therefore engage in a series of robustness checks using respondents’ background characteristics to account for any slight imbalances across treatments.

4. Empirical approach and main findings

With subscript i for respondents, our baseline regression model is given by:

$$Image_i = \alpha + \beta OwnParty_i (+Controls) + \varepsilon_i$$

The dependent variable $Image_i$ equals respondents’ perception of how the presented national-level scandal influences the image of the affected party at the national *or* local level (as defined above). The key variable of interest $OwnParty_i$ is set to 1 for local councilors presented with

a scandal involving members of their *own* party, while it is 0 for local councilors presented with a scandal in *another* party. Parameter β thus reflects the extent to which local councilors' perceptions of a major national scandal depend on whether it arises in their *own* party versus *another* party. While successful randomization in principle makes control variables superfluous, adding controls can improve precision (Druckman et al., 2011). Hence, we estimate the model both with and without controls for respondents' party affiliation, political position (1 for politicians holding an executive position), number of terms, gender (1 if male), education level (1 if university degree), age and size of Local Authority (using a four-point ordinal scale).⁴ Given the ordinal nature of the response variables, we estimate ordered logistic regressions as our main specification. Still, we also estimated OLS models as a robustness check and to aid interpretation of effect sizes (see below).

Tables 2 and 3 summarize the main results. In Table 2, columns 1-3 assess the perceived impact of a national-level scandal on the party image at the national level, while columns 4-6 assess the perceived impact on the party image at the local level. Columns 1 and 4 include the full sample. Columns 2 and 5 cover the sample for which all control variables are available. Columns 3 and 6 introduce the full set of control variables. In Table 3, all regressions include a full set of control variables and we separate the results by the various scandal types presented to respondents. Columns 1 and 4 focus on a generic, undefined scandal, columns 2 and 5 on a financial scandal and columns 3 and 6 on a moral scandal. While Tables 2 and 3 present ordered logit coefficients, Tables A.1 and A.2 in the Online Appendix present OLS results and Figures A.1 and A.2 in the Online Appendix contain a set of histograms plotting respondents' raw answers. These alternatives allow observing the direction and size of any distributional shifts due to our treatments, and also help interpret effect sizes.⁵

⁴ To guarantee complete anonymity, the survey did not include questions about respondents' local authority beyond its regional location and size (in four broad categories). As such, we unfortunately are unable to include further controls for these authorities' characteristics.

⁵ We evaluate the statistical significance of any distributional shifts using Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests. All results discussed in the main text are robust to this alternative, (non-)parametric methodological approach. See section A of the Online Appendix for more details. Furthermore, we assess whether respondents for the local party image question are located further towards the extremes of the scale in the own party treatment (which might arise when respondents have more information about their – specified – own party than an – unspecified – other party. A Wilcoxon signed-rank test (which tests the equality of matched pairs of observations by looking at the ranks of observations) as well as a test for whether the median of the differences between matched pairs of observations is zero (which evaluates whether the proportion of positive/negative 'signs' is exactly one-half) provide no evidence of such effects. These additional results suggest that the 'own party' distribution is not more extreme than the 'other party' distribution. We are grateful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this additional test.

All but one of the point estimates for parameter β in Tables 2 and 3 is positive. This indicates that the response distribution generally shifts towards a *higher* perceived impact of a scandal on the party image when it concerns politicians' *own* party (relative to scandals in other parties). Consistent with Hypotheses 1b and 2, this shift is particularly prominent and statistically significant beyond the 99% confidence level in columns 1-3 of either table, where local politicians evaluate the scandal's impact on the *national* party image. It fails to reach statistical significance in columns 4-6 when considering the *local* party image. Using the OLS results in Tables A.1 and A.2 as well as the distributional shifts in Figures A.1 and A.2, our analysis suggests that the response distribution on average shifts approximately 0.3-0.4 points on the seven-point scale when analyzing the *national* party image. This represents just over 20-25% of the dependent variable's standard deviation, which is a substantively meaningful effect size.

Table 2: Effect of national scandal on own vs. other party image

Variable	National party			Local party		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Own Party	0.505 *** (0.078)	0.630 *** (0.088)	0.615 *** (0.089)	0.006 (0.077)	0.029 (0.087)	0.002 (0.087)
Controls	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
N	2133	1664	1664	2122	1659	1659
LR Chi ²	42.74 ***	51.52 ***	104.98 ***	0.01	0.11	70.73 ***

Note: The table summarizes the results from a set of ordered logistic regressions where the dependent variable reflects respondents' answer (on a seven-point scale) to the question how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal within their party (or another party) at the national level to affect the image of their party (or that other party). Columns 1-3 assess the perceived impact on the party at the national level, while columns 4-6 assess the perceived impact on the party at the local level. The central independent variable *Own Party* is an indicator equal to 1 if it concerns a scandal in politicians' own party, 0 for a scandal in another party. Columns 1 and 4 include the full sample. Columns 2 and 5 include the sample for which all control variables are available. Columns 3 and 6 include a full set of control variables (i.e. party, political position, number of terms, gender, education level, age and size of Local Authority). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table 3: Effect of national scandal on own vs. other party image (by scandal type)

Variable	National party			Local party		
	<i>Generic</i>	<i>Financial</i>	<i>Moral</i>	<i>Generic</i>	<i>Financial</i>	<i>Moral</i>
Own Party	0.778 *** (0.156)	0.580 *** (0.161)	0.470 *** (0.152)	-0.047 (0.151)	0.068 (0.158)	0.007 (0.150)
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N	561	525	578	558	526	575

LR Chi ²	49.89 ***	45.74 ***	27.90 ***	34.63 ***	35.11 ***	20.12 *
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Note: The table summarizes the results from a set of ordered logistic regressions where the dependent variable reflects respondents' answer (on a seven-point scale) to the question how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal within their party (or another party) at the national level to affect the image of their party (or that other party). Columns 1-3 assess the perceived impact on the party at the national level, while columns 4-6 assess the perceived impact on the party at the local level. The central independent variable *Own Party* is an indicator equal to 1 if it concerns a scandal in politicians' own party, 0 for a scandal in another party. Columns 1 and 4 focus on a generic, undefined scandal, while columns 2 and 5 focus on a financial scandal and columns 3 and 6 focus on a moral scandal. All regressions include a full set of control variables (i.e. party, political position, number of terms, gender, education level, age and size of Local Authority). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table 3 shows that the same pattern is replicated across all three types of scandals. That is, when evaluating a scandal's impact on the national party image (columns 1-3), there is always a statistically significant shift towards higher perceived impacts when it concerns politicians' *own* party. The effect sizes here suggest shifts in the response distribution equal to 0.5, 0.35 and 0.25 for the generic, financial and moral scandals, respectively. No statistically significant differences are observed between scandals in one's own or another party when politicians are asked about a national-level scandal's impact on the local party image (column 4-6).

Table 4 looks at the latter result in more detail by analyzing the extent to which respondents think that the scandal has a stronger impact on national party brands compared to local party brands. This direct assessment of the *local* versus *national* consequences of a national-level scandal requires a slight reformulation of our regression model:

$$Image_i = \alpha_i + \delta National_i + \varepsilon_i$$

The dependent variable is defined as before. The variable of interest now is *National_i*, which is 1 when local councilors are asked about the impact of a scandal on the *national* party image, while it is 0 when asking about the *local* party image. Parameter δ reflects the extent to which perceptions of a scandal depend on how close to home politicians' evaluation is. Remember that all politicians are asked about the impact of a scandal at both the national and local party level (Figure 1).⁶ Hence, we can include a full set of individual fixed effects (α_i) in these

⁶ Remember also that the question order is fixed. While this is likely to affect our estimate of the parameter δ , it will not affect our ability to draw inferences about this parameter across individuals in the own- and other-party treatments. As before, Figures A.3 and A.4 in the Online Appendix provide results from a non-parametric robustness test using histograms plotting our respondents' answers and Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests. The findings are equivalent to those reported in Table 4.

regressions to accommodate any (un)observed individual-level heterogeneity (obviating any need for additional individual-level control variables).

The results indicate that politicians, unsurprisingly, perceive the impact of a scandal to be more severe at the level of government where the scandal actually takes place. Yet, crucially, this national-versus-local shift in the mass of the response distribution is much larger when politicians are asked about their own party (approximately 0.8-0.95 on the seven-point scale) rather than another party (circa 0.4-0.7 on the seven-point scale). This indicates that local politicians tone down the local impact of a national scandal to a substantially larger extent for their *own* party. Difference-in-means t-tests (Table A.3 in the Online Appendix) and regression models extended with an interaction between the partisan treatment effect and the local-versus-national setting (Table A.4 in the Online Appendix) confirm that these differences are statistically significant for the entire sample as well as for all three scandal types. This finding is consistent with a ‘friends-and-neighbourhoods’ effect leading politicians to (selectively) downgrade any threat of the scandal to themselves – though not to their direct electoral opponents – at the local electoral level (Meredith, 2013; Fiva and Halse, 2016). Such observation can be viewed as a form of motivated reasoning (Taber and Lodge, 2006) whereby politicians selectively interpret information that allows a relatively more negative view of their electoral opponents – which might reflect a form of ‘wishful thinking’.

Table 4: Effect of national scandal on national vs. local party image

	Own party				Other party			
	<i>Full</i> (1)	<i>Generic</i> (2)	<i>Financial</i> (3)	<i>Moral</i> (4)	<i>Full</i> (5)	<i>Generic</i> (6)	<i>Financial</i> (7)	<i>Moral</i> (8)
National image	0.893 *** (0.039)	0.949 *** (0.065)	0.934 *** (0.073)	0.796 *** (0.067)	0.533 *** (0.041)	0.474 *** (0.073)	0.704 *** (0.068)	0.425 *** (0.069)
Individual FE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
N councilors	1070	373	334	363	1048	342	348	358
R ² (within)	0.326	0.364	0.332	0.282	0.142	0.109	0.237	0.096

Note: The table summarizes the results from a set of linear regressions where the dependent variable reflects respondents’ answer (on a seven-point scale) to the question how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal within their party (or another party) at the national level to affect the image of their party (or that other party). Columns 1-4 assess the perceived impact on politicians’ own party, while columns 5-8 assess the perceived impact on another party. The central independent variable *National image* is an indicator equal to 1 if politicians’ assessment regards the image of the party at the national level (i.e. where the scandal occurs), 0 when it concerns the image of the local party branch. All models include a full set of individual fixed effects, and have standard errors clustered at the individual level. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

5. Conclusion

This article provides the first experimental analysis of how politicians perceive the impact of scandals involving their peers. Our results allow three main conclusions. First, we show that local politicians on average perceive a larger impact of national-level scandals on the national party image when it concerns their *own* party compared to another party. Second, we find that this own-party bias weakens when evaluating the impact of a scandal at the level of one's own (local) electoral arena. We argue that this may reflect a form of motivated reasoning whereby politicians selectively value the persistence of their local electoral support (too?) highly (reflective of a friends-and-neighbourhoods effect) – thus taking a more negative view of their direct electoral opponents. Third, we show that all observed average treatment effects are independent of the type of scandal (i.e. generic, financial or moral).

Although our experimental design allows a clean assessment of how politicians perceive the impact of scandals involving their peers, like all research designs it comes with limitations. These lead to a number of avenues for further research. A first limitation is that our vignettes present a hypothetical scenario and provide only limited information about the scandal. More detailed information – such as whether the scandal involves an abuse of power or the political position(s) of those involved – may enrich the inferences drawn. Second, we study scandals at the national level and their spillovers at the local level. Future research should analyze whether local scandals likewise impact upon higher-level governments, and to what extent such top-down and bottom-up spillover effects have diverging strengths. Closely related, it would be interesting to study the effect of scandals on politicians in different jurisdictions at the *same* level of government (i.e. horizontal rather than vertical spillovers). Third, our analysis can only evaluate politicians' initial perceptions of the described scandal. While we view these initial perceptions as important (see introduction), the empirical design does not enable us to say anything about what happens when bad news accumulates over time (Thesen et al., 2019). Finally, we focus on politicians' perception of scandals, and do not assess their actual responses to them. Key follow-up questions thus may include whether and when politicians pursue defensive (e.g., formulate excuses or justifications) or offensive (e.g., accusing other politicians of misconduct) strategies in response to corruption allegations, or how politicians readjust their position towards their party when it becomes embroiled in a scandal (e.g., public defence or criticism, defections or even party switching). This would also allow assessing whether and how perceptions link to actions, which deserves in-depth scrutiny in future work.

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ONLINE APPENDIX

to

Partisan Bias in Politicians' Perception of Scandals

A. Robustness check using non-parametric tests

Figure A.1 contains a set of histograms plotting our respondents' answers about the impact of a national-level scandal on the popular image of the implicated party. Grey bars depict the distribution of answers among politicians asked about a scandal involving members of their *own* party, while transparent bars show the distribution among politicians asked about a scandal in *another* party. Figure A.2 provides the same information differentiated by the three scandal types included in our analysis. The left-hand panel of Figure A.1 (and top panel of Figure A.2) depicts responses from politicians asked about the scandal's impact at the *national* level, while the right-hand panel of Figure A.1 (and bottom panel of Figure A.2) presents answers from politicians asked about the scandal's impact at the *local* level. To evaluate our main hypotheses, we assess the statistical significance of any distributional shifts in respondents' answers as presented in figures A.1 and A.2. Such distributional shifts reflect the extent to which politicians' perceptions of a scandal depend on whether it occurs within their own party compared to another party. We assess the statistical significance of any such shifts using Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests. The null hypothesis of these tests is that distinct respondent samples show the same distributional characteristics and might therefore derive from the same population.

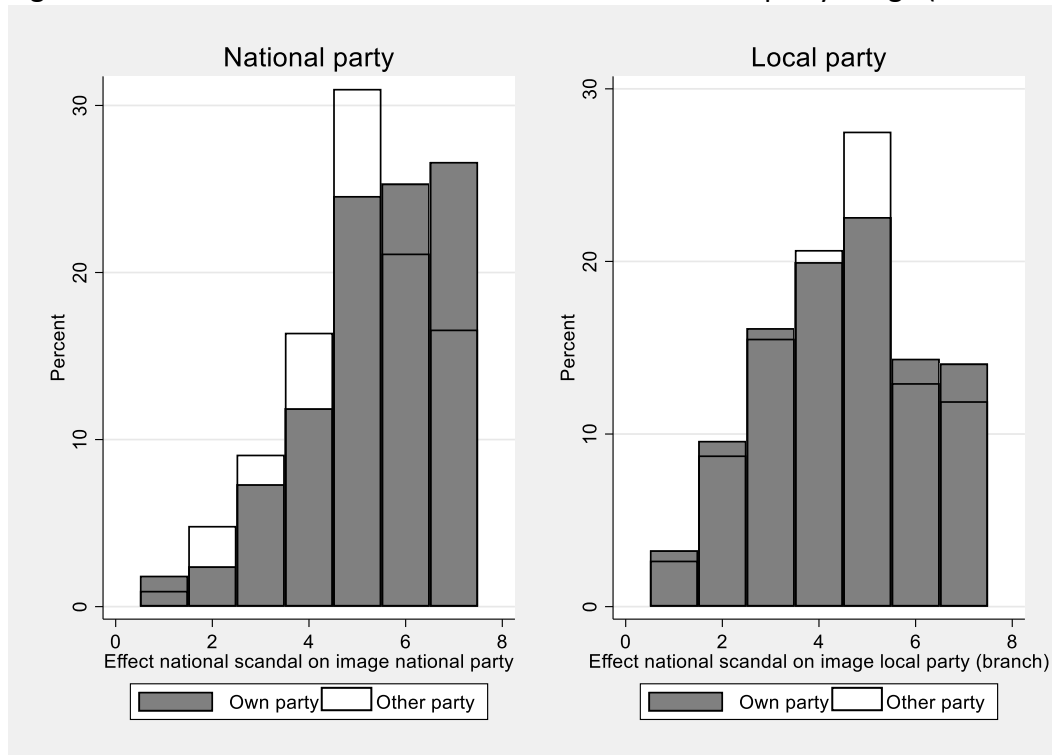
Both panels in Figure A.1 indicate that the response distribution shifts towards a higher perceived impact when it concerns politicians' *own* party. This shift is particularly prominent and statistically significant beyond the 99% confidence level in the left-hand panel ($\text{Chi}^2 = 42.43$; $p < 0.01$), where politicians evaluate the scandal's impact on the national party image. It fails to reach statistical significance in the right-hand panel when assessing the scandal's impact on the local party image ($\text{Chi}^2 = 0.01$; $p > 0.10$). Figure A.2 shows that the same pattern is replicated across all three types of scandals. That is, when evaluating a scandal's impact on the national party image (top panel of Figure A.2), there is always a statistically significant shift towards higher perceived impacts when it concerns politicians' *own* party (Chi^2 [Generic] = 25.38; Chi^2 [Financial] = 12.92; Chi^2 [Moral] = 8.20; $p < 0.01$ in all cases). No significant differences are observed between scandals in one's own or another party when politicians' are asked about a national-level scandal's impact on the local party image (bottom panel of Figure A.2). This replicates the results in Tables 3 and 4 in the main text.

Figures A.3 and A.4 again contain histograms plotting our respondents' answers. Yet, these histograms are now structured to evaluate any differences between responses about the national versus local party image (rather than own versus other party, as in Figures A.1 and A.2). Hence, grey bars now depict the distribution of answers when politicians are asked about the impact of a scandal on the *national* party image, while transparent bars show the distribution of answers among these same politicians when asked about the *local* party image. Figure A.3 combines observations across all scandal types, while figure A.4 separates observations from generic, financial and moral scandals. Given that we now assess shifts *within* the same individual, we assess the statistical significance of any such shifts using the Wilcoxon signed-rank test.⁷

The results confirm that the impact of a scandal is perceived to be stronger at the level of government where the scandal actually takes place ($z = 23.743$, $p < 0.01$). Nonetheless, this effect is stronger for politicians asked about their own party ($z = 20.071$, $p < 0.01$) rather than another party ($z = 13.260$, $p < 0.01$). These findings are again in line with those presented in the main text.

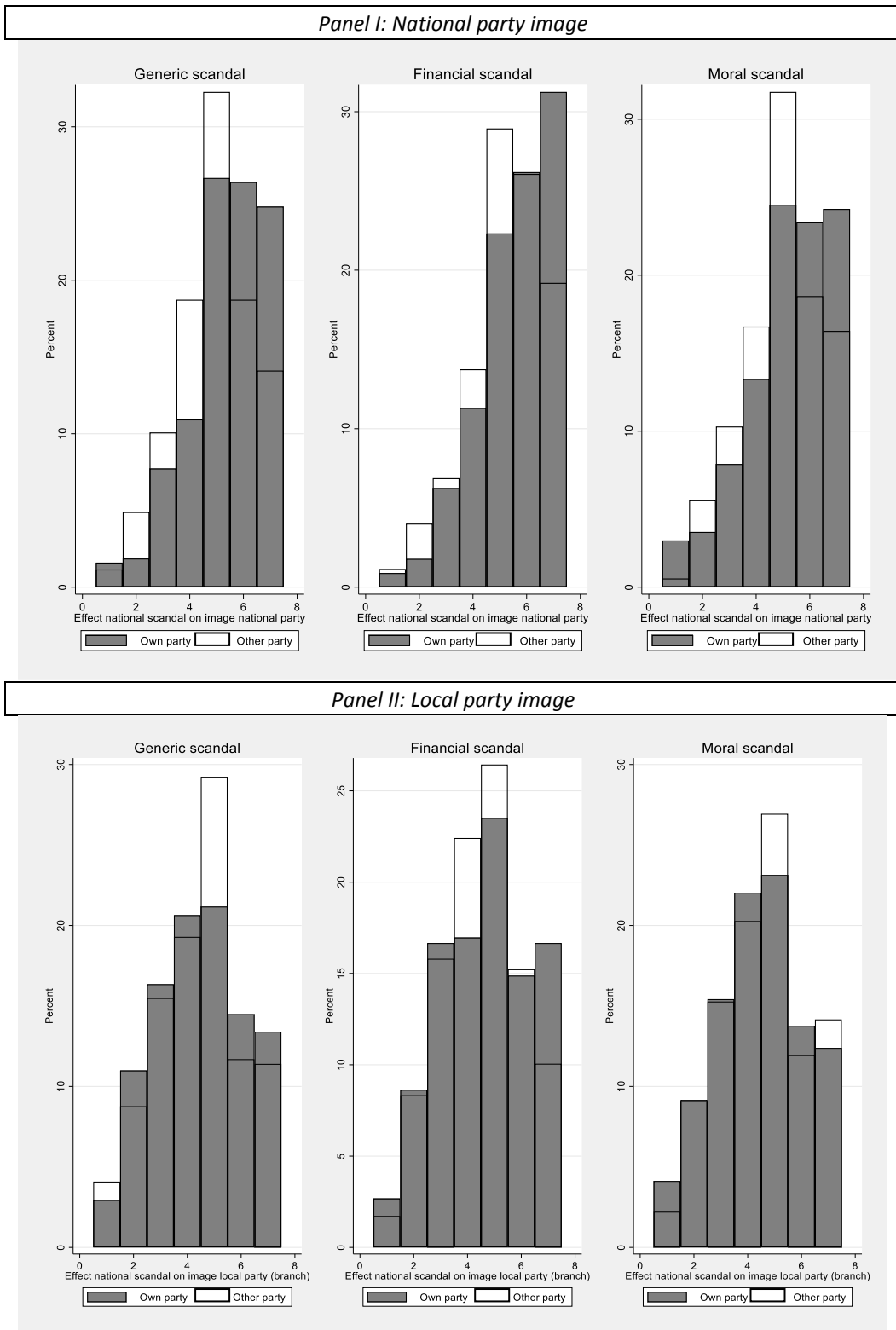
⁷ This test looks at the entire distribution. Similar results are obtained if we instead test for differences in the median of the respective distributions (using a two-sided sign test) or the mean (using a two-sided difference-in-means t-test).

Figure A.1: Effect of national scandal on own versus other party image (between-subject)



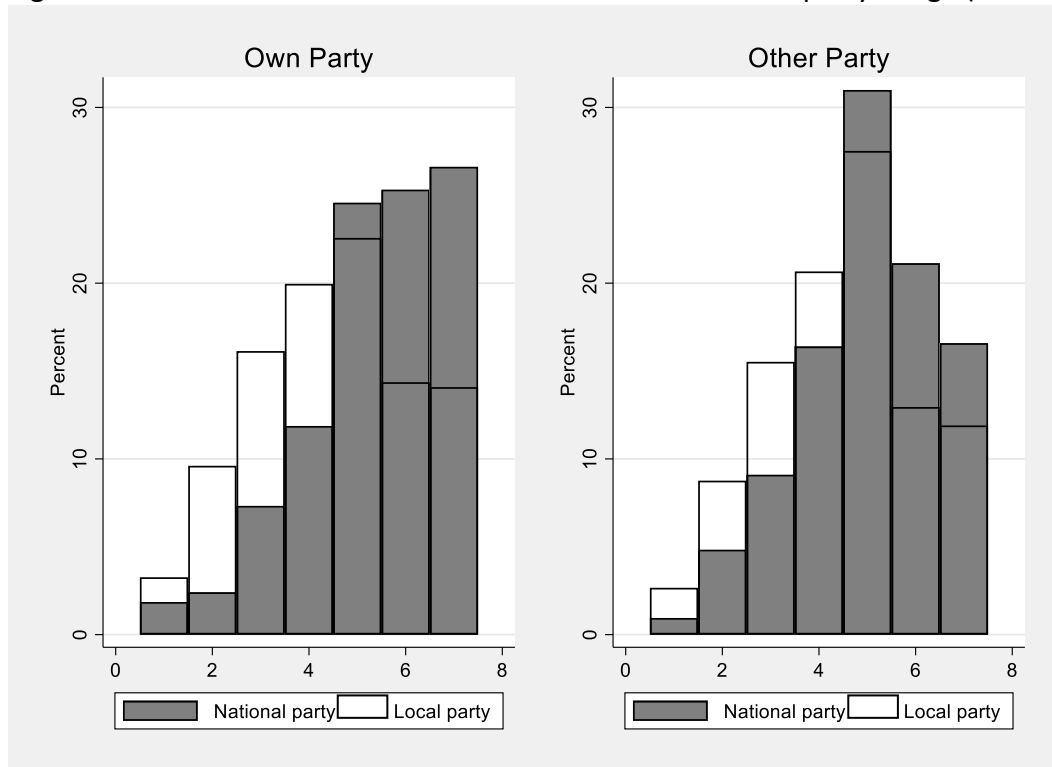
Note: The graph reflects the distribution of respondents on a seven-point scale reflecting how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal with their party (or another party) at the national level affects the image of their party (or that other party). The left-hand graph assesses the perceived impact on the party at the national level, while the right-hand graph depicts the perceived impact on the party at the local level. Gray bars show results for a scandal in politicians' own party, whereas transparent bars show results for a scandal in another party.

Figure A.2: Effect of national scandal on own versus other party image (by scandal type)



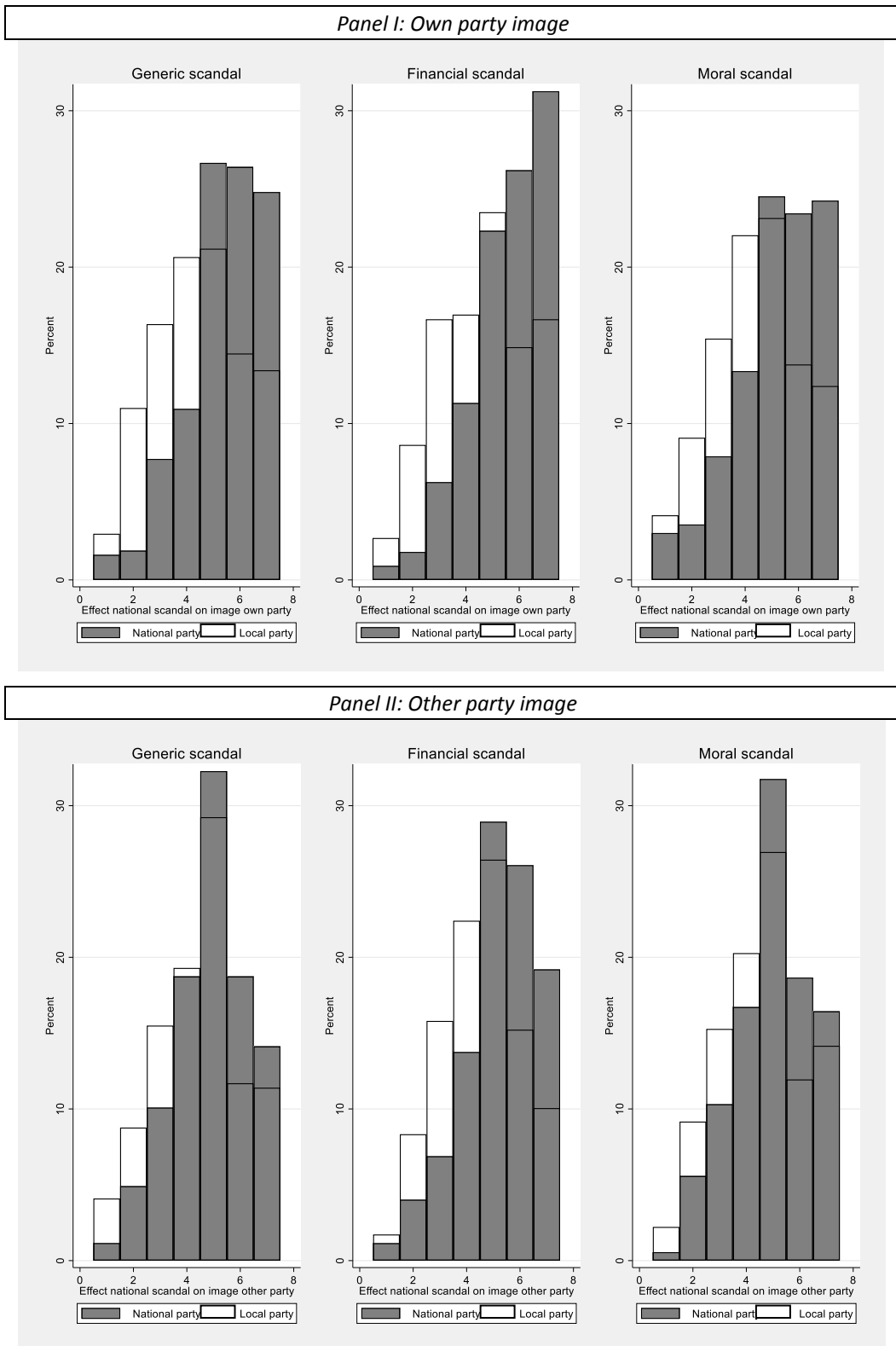
Note: The graph reflects the distribution of respondents on a seven-point scale reflecting how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal with their party (or another party) at the national level affects the image of their party (or that other party). Panel I assesses the perceived impact on the party at the national level, while Panel II depicts the perceived impact on the party at the local level. Gray bars show results for a scandal in politicians’ own party, whereas transparent bars show results for a scandal in another party. In each case, the left-hand plot focuses on a generic, undefined scandal, the central plot on a financial scandal, and the right-hand plot on a moral scandal.

Figure A.3: Effect of national scandal on national versus local party image (within-subject)



Note: The graph reflects the distribution of respondents on a seven-point scale reflecting how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal with their party (or another party) at the national level affects the image of their party (or that other party). The left-hand graph assesses the perceived impact on politicians' own party, while the right-hand graph depicts the perceived impact on another party. Gray bars show the perceived impact for parties at the national level, whereas show the perceived impact for parties at the local level.

Figure A.4: Effect of national scandal on national versus local party image (by scandal type)



Note: The graph reflects the distribution of respondents on a seven-point scale reflecting how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal with their party (or another party) at the national level affects the image of their party (or that other party). Panel I assesses the perceived impact on politicians' own party, while Panel II depicts the perceived impact on another party. Gray bars show results for the party at the national level, whereas transparent bars show results for the party at the local level. In each case, the left-hand plot focuses on a generic, undefined scandal, the central plot on a financial scandal, and the right-hand plot on a moral scandal.

Table A.1: Effect of national scandal on own vs. other party image (OLS)

Variable	National party			Local party		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Own Party	0.360*** (0.0620)	0.464*** (0.0692)	0.440*** (0.0687)	0.00319 (0.0691)	0.0240 (0.0780)	-0.00754 (0.0772)
Controls	NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	YES
Observations	2,133	1,664	1,664	2,122	1,659	1,659
R-squared	0.016	0.026	0.058	0.000	0.000	0.040

Note: The table replicates Table 2 in the main text using OLS. The dependent variable reflects respondents' answer (on a seven-point scale) to the question how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal within their party (or another party) at the national level to affect the image of their party (or that other party). Columns 1-3 assess the perceived impact on the party at the national level, while columns 4-6 assess the perceived impact on the party at the local level. The central independent variable *Own Party* is an indicator equal to 1 if it concerns a scandal in politicians' own party, 0 for a scandal in another party. Columns 1 and 4 include the full sample. Columns 2 and 5 include the sample for which all control variables are available. Columns 3 and 6 include a full set of control variables (i.e. party, political position, number of terms, gender, education level, age and size of Local Authority). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table A.2: Effect of national scandal on own vs. other party image by scandal type (OLS)

Variable	National party			Local party		
	<i>Generic</i>	<i>Financial</i>	<i>Moral</i>	<i>Generic</i>	<i>Financial</i>	<i>Moral</i>
Own Party	0.528*** (0.0822)	0.440*** (0.0844)	0.343*** (0.0873)	-0.0510 (0.0944)	0.0446 (0.0953)	-0.0161 (0.0962)
Controls	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
Observations	1,122	1,050	1,156	1,116	1,052	1,150
R-squared	0.083	0.078	0.046	0.061	0.062	0.033

Note: The table replicates Table 3 in the main text using OLS. The dependent variable reflects respondents' answer (on a seven-point scale) to the question how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal within their party (or another party) at the national level to affect the image of their party (or that other party). Columns 1-3 assess the perceived impact on the party at the national level, while columns 4-6 assess the perceived impact on the party at the local level. The central independent variable *Own Party* is an indicator equal to 1 if it concerns a scandal in politicians' own party, 0 for a scandal in another party. Columns 1 and 4 focus on a generic, undefined scandal, while columns 2 and 5 focus on a financial scandal and columns 3 and 6 focus on a moral scandal. All regressions include a full set of control variables (i.e. party, political position, number of terms, gender, education level, age and size of Local Authority). ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table A.3: T-test on difference in perceived impact on national versus local party image across partisan treatments

Variable	<i>Full sample</i>	<i>Generic</i>	<i>Financial</i>	<i>Moral</i>
Own party	0.893 (0.039)	0.949 (0.065)	0.934 (0.073)	0.796 (0.067)
Other party	0.533 (0.041)	0.473 (0.073)	0.704 (0.068)	0.425 (0.069)
<i>Difference</i>	0.359	0.475	0.230	0.372
<i>T-test of difference</i>	6.357 ***	4.847 ***	2.317 **	3.863 ***

Note: The table summarizes the results from t-tests

TO DO: ADD EXPLANATORY NOTE

Table A.4: Fixed effects model with interaction term

Variable	<i>Full</i> (1)	<i>Generic</i> (2)	<i>Financial</i> (3)	<i>Moral</i> (4)
Own Party	-	-	-	-
National image	0.533 *** (0.041)	0.474 *** (0.073)	0.704 *** (0.068)	0.425 *** (0.069)
Own Party * National image	0.359 *** (0.057)	0.475 *** (0.098)	0.230 ** (0.099)	0.372 *** (0.096)
Individual FE	YES	YES	YES	YES
N councilors	2127	720	683	724
R ² (within)	0.243	0.254	0.289	0.197

Note: The table summarizes the results from a set of linear regressions where the dependent variable reflects respondents' answer (on a seven-point scale) to the question how much they perceive the revelation of a scandal within their party (or another party) at the national level to affect the image of their party (or that other party). The variable *Own Party* is an indicator equal to 1 if the scandal scandal within their own party, 0 when it concerns another party (since this is fixed within individuals, it drops out of the regression model due to the presence of individuals-level fixed effects). The variable *National image* is an indicator equal to 1 if politicians' assessment regards the image of the party at the national level (i.e. where the scandal occurs), 0 when it concerns the image of the local party branch. All models include a full set of individual fixed effects, and have standard errors clustered at the individual level. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

B. Check of random assignment across treatments

Table B.1: Random assignment across treatments (logit model)

Variable	Own party vs. Other party (1)	Generic scandal (2)	Financial scandal (3)	Moral scandal (4)
Intercept	0.547 * (0.304)	-0.611 * (0.322)	-1.377 *** (0.325)	-0.137 (0.316)
Age	-0.005 (0.04)	-0.004 (0.004)	0.007 * (0.04)	-0.003 (0.004)
Male	-0.143 (0.110)	0.023 (0.116)	0.098 (0.120)	-0.115 (0.115)
Education	-0.351 *** (0.108)	0.063 (0.114)	0.065 (0.116)	-0.124 (0.112)
Position	-0.084 (0.112)	0.097 (0.118)	-0.156 (0.122)	0.052 (0.118)
Terms	0.001 (0.022)	0.006 (0.023)	0.008 (0.024)	-0.015 (0.023)
England	0.006 (0.149)	0.128 (0.158)	0.107 (0.161)	-0.220 (0.155)
Labour	0.139 (0.178)	-0.074 (0.188)	0.019 (0.191)	0.052 (0.187)
Conservative	0.157 (0.186)	-0.008 (0.195)	0.003 (0.198)	0.001 (0.195)
Liberal Democrat	0.137 (0.202)	0.024 (0.212)	-0.258 (0.219)	0.211 (0.212)
N	1677	1677	1677	1677
Likelihood ratio test for joint significance (p-value)	0.124	0.953	0.394	0.610

Note: The table provides the results from logit models with binary dependent variables for our various treatments. Column (1) compares respondents presented with a scandal in their own (value 1) or another party (value 0). Columns (2), (3) and (4) assess respondents presented with either a generic, financial or moral scandal. Explanatory variables include respondents' age, gender (1 if male), education level (1 if university degree), number of terms, party affiliation (i.e. dummies for Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrats; reference group is all other parties), political position (dummy equal to 1 for politicians holding an executive position), region (1 if England) and size of Local Authority (using a four-point ordinal scale). Robust standard errors in brackets. ***, ** and * indicate statistical significance at the 1%, 5% and 10% level, respectively.

Table B.2: Random assignment across treatments (Kruskal-Wallis rank test)

Variable	Own party vs. Other party (1)	Scandal type (2)
Male	0.435	0.386
Age	0.624	0.458
Education	0.004	0.164
Position	0.773	0.388
Terms	0.878	0.706
Region	0.553	0.042
Party	0.778	0.249

Note: The table provides the p-value of Kruskal-Wallis equality-of-populations rank tests, where the null hypothesis is that several samples show the same distributional characteristics (and might thus derive from the same population). Column (1) compares the respondent samples presented with a scandal in their own or another party, whereas Column (2) compares the respondent samples presented with three different types of scandals (i.e. a generic scandal, a financial scandal, and a moral scandal). 'Education' is respondents' highest obtained degree, while 'Position' is the type of position held by the respondent (e.g., mayor, leader of the council, cabinet member, or councilor). 'Terms' is the number of legislative periods (usually lasting four years) a respondent has started including the current one. 'Region' refers to respondents' region (i.e. England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, or Wales).

Table B.3: Representativity of sample included in analysis

	2013 Census of Local Authority Councilors	Total population on contact list	Experiment sample
Male	67.3 %	-	70.5 %
Age (mean)	60.2 years	-	60.0 years
Age (% under 45)	12.0 %	-	14.56 %
Age (% over 70)	22.2 %	-	26.43 %
Terms	9.5 years	-	2.45 terms
Education (% at degree level)	58.8%	-	64.96%
Region – Wales	-	6.06 %	6.74%
Region – Scotland	-	5.93 %	8.79 %
Region – N.Ireland	-	2.23 %	1.81 %
Region – England	-	85.78 %	82.22 %
Party – Conservative	-	43.64 %	31.50 %
Party – Labour	-	31.31 %	36.91 %
Party – LibDem	-	9.01 %	14.50%