

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals
Brandon Rottinghaus
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

THE INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTS OF EXECUTIVE SCANDALS

Watergate, Iran-Contra, Lewinsky, Enron, Bridgegate: According to the popular media, executive scandals are ubiquitous. Although individual scandals persist in the public memory and as the subject of academic study, how do we understand the impacts of executive indiscretion or malfeasance as a whole? What effect, if any, do scandals have on political polarization, governance, and most importantly democratic accountability?

Recognizing the important and enduring role of scandals in American government, this book proposes a common intellectual framework for understanding their nature and political effects. Brandon Rottinghaus takes a systematic look at the dynamics of the duration of scandals, the way they affect presidents' and governors' capacity to govern, and the strategic choices executives make in confronting scandal at both the state and national levels. His findings reveal much about not only scandal, but the operation of American politics.

Brandon Rottinghaus is an associate professor of political science and Senator Don Henderson Scholar at the University of Houston. Professor Rottinghaus is the cofounder of the Presidential Proclamations Project, an online resource documenting presidential use of unilateral powers through executive proclamation. His most recent book is *The Provisional Pulpit: Modern Presidential Leadership of Public Opinion* (2010).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals

Brandon Rottinghaus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals

Brandon Rottinghaus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals

BRANDON ROTTINGHAUS

University of Houston



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals
Brandon Rottinghaus
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

32 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10013-2473, USA

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107102972

© Brandon Rottinghaus 2015

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2015

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Rottinghaus, Brandon, 1977–

The institutional effects of executive scandals / Brandon Rottinghaus.

pages cm

ISBN 978-1-107-10297-2 (hardback)

1. Political corruption – United States. 2. Government executives – United States.
3. Misconduct in office – United States. 4. United States – Politics and government. I. Title.

JK2249.R67 2015

306.20973–dc23 2014047364

ISBN 978-1-107-10297-2 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party Internet Web sites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such Web sites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals
Brandon Rottinghaus
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

To Tracy

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals

Brandon Rottinghaus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i>	ix
Introduction		1
1 Studying Scandals: State and National Executive Scandals		15
2 Strategic Decisions: Stonewall or Come Clean?		40
3 The Institutional and Political Dynamics of Political Survival		67
4 The Effect of Scandal on Executive Action and Policy Selection		90
5 The Effect of Scandals on Executive-Legislative Relations		115
6 Scandals and Charges of Corruption		140
7 The Impacts and Implications of Executive Scandals on the American Political System		160
<i>Notes</i>		175
<i>Bibliography</i>		185
<i>Index</i>		205

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals

Brandon Rottinghaus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals

Brandon Rottinghaus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

The genesis of my interest in political scandal began as I came of political age during the Clinton administration, when scandals seemed to constantly shadow the president and his staff. The apex of my academic interest emerged in 2005 when the mayor of Spokane, Jim West, an ardent opponent of gay rights throughout his political career, was accused of visiting a gay Internet chat site and offering a City Hall internship and various gifts to a young man he met there (Brunner 2005). Deepening the scandal, one “young man” with whom the mayor had an online relationship turned out to be a computer expert hired by the Spokane *Spokesman-Review* newspaper to ensnare the mayor in these online activities. The ensuing political fallout led to investigations, lawsuits, and a recall of the mayor, crippling (temporarily) city government. The scandal was both politically explosive and institutionally consequential, as city leaders and public officials attempted to find a way to move forward.

While not all (or even most) elected or appointed public officials have skeletons in their closets or an intent to violate the public trust, this particular scandal got me thinking about the consequences of scandal to the political system. The ramifications for city government in Spokane were significant but temporary, but other major scandals in other locations and other institutions often have different consequences, some greater and some smaller. My interest piqued, I set out to explain the nature and function of scandals in relation to executive governance. This book is a culmination, as yet incomplete, of this ongoing interest.

This book is the first systematic examination of executive scandals, the nature of these scandals, the reaction of the participants to these scandals, and the effect on the political system at both the state and national levels, affecting both governors and presidents from 1972 to 2012. The findings are telling. In the aftermath of scandal, political actors demonstrate a robust institutional

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-10297-2 - The Institutional Effects of Executive Scandals

Brandon Rottinghaus

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

resiliency, and although political accountability is often compromised, the political system responds with additional scrutiny. Indeed, chief executives are generally more likely to adapt than retrench. Executives react expectedly to scandals, dictated by their central position in the political system. Both presidents and governors respond aggressively to revelations of scandal, large and small, by adapting their behavior and using the powers of their office to demonstrate political fortitude. Although the institutions of government survive these crises, democratic accountability, the lifeblood of the public political system, is often limited by scandal.

Yet, the health of democracy is stable, even considering the oft-assumed deleterious effects of scandal. The system bends but does not break in the aftermath of these crises; the system maintains good health and is responsive in predictable ways. The system reacts to investigate and admonish further wrongdoing in the aftermath of scandals. Ultimately, the institutional ramifications for executive scandals demonstrate impressive adaptability of the actors involved and the system at large.

All books accrue debts, both intellectual and otherwise. Some can never be repaid. I hope to use this small space to acknowledge a few. My department and college at the University of Houston were generous with research funds, resources for hosting small conferences, and time for completion of the book itself. Archivists at the Carter, Reagan, and Clinton Libraries (and generous research grants from the Carter and Reagan Foundations) provided excellent resources to give background and life to the political characters in the text. Several colleagues provided advice or guidance along the way, including Jeff Cohen, Jay McCann, Logan Dancey, and Beth Miller Vonnahme. Other colleagues generously shared their data with me, including Jon Rogowski, Thad Kousser, and Doug Kriner. David Parker also shared his scandal search text script for me to adapt. Research presentations at Rutgers University's Eagleton Center (including a helpful research grant), Loyola University Chicago, Boise State, and Washington University in St. Louis provided helpful feedback and served as the basis for improving the book. This work also benefited greatly from early collaboration with my University of Houston colleague Scott Basinger, born in mutual love of the oddities of politics and brown spirits. Colleague, friend, and fellow suffering Cubs fan Justin Vaughn read the whole manuscript and provided some timely and helpful feedback for which I am grateful. Special thanks also goes to my faithful research assistants Chris Nicholson and Leonardo Antenangeli, who diligently and painstakingly tracked down details on scandals both major and minor. Finally, and most importantly, John Berger, my esteemed editor at Cambridge University Press, was steadfast from the start of this project and thoughtful about how to put all the pieces together.

As with all major projects, too much time is taken away from fun family events, especially those in sun-kissed islands and lakeside getaways, definitely to be made up for in future trips around the Lone Star State and beyond. To my parents, Gene and Karen, who helped organize some of the research documentation early on, thank you for making all this possible (and enjoyable). To my boys, B.J. and Ben, who create near constant scandals around the house, I thank you for disrupting our little institution in the perfect way you do. And, finally, to Tracy, to whom this book is dedicated, your editing skills are surpassed only by what an amazing wife and mother you are. Thank you for everything (not in passive voice).