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Media scrutiny of politicians and the relevance of private life and personality

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Media Scrutiny of Politicians and the Relevance of Private Life and Personality

A Project Presented to
the Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters
James Madison University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

by Stephanie Lynn Salomon

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Dedication

To my wonderful parents. I would not be the person I am today without your love and guidance.

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Abstract

Over the course of the postwar era, media scrutiny of public officials has increased immensely. This scrutiny, while at first applied only to the public lives of politicians, has come to include their private lives and personalities. I seek to examine the factors that may have caused this scrutiny over time including technology, relationship with the media, the use of anonymous sources, competition among the media, and the availability of 24-hour news. Using a qualitative case study approach, I will analyze three presidential scandals in order to determine how these variables may explain an increase in the media scrutiny of public officials. Based on my findings, these variables appear related to the level of media scrutiny that public officials endure, although I was unable to determine if these variables cause scrutiny to increase or are just correlated with increased scrutiny.

Introduction

In modern times, it seems that the media scrutinize every move a politician makes. Private matters that become known are suddenly fit for public consumption, regardless of their nature or relevance. Personal financial troubles, infidelity, and health concerns are some of the topics the media see fit for national publication. The media defends their probes and reports, explaining that this information is crucial to evaluate the character of politicians and determine if they are fit for public office. Although this is the norm today, the media did not always scrutinize the private lives of politicians. The media made distinctions between the public and private spheres and adhered to an unwritten code that they would not publish stories that were deemed irrelevant to holding public office. Significant cultural and technological changes, along with the growing mistrust of the federal government, conspired to fundamentally alter the media environment and the rules that govern journalism.

In this thesis I will examine three presidential scandals across three decades with the hopes of determining the factors that cause a media feeding frenzy. My examination will take into account technological advancements, the relationship between the media and the president, and the media environment and how these factors affect the nature of scandal coverage. As a result of this research, I hope to explain why matters once ignored by the media are now considered relevant in the evaluations of political figures.

Literature Review

Much scholarly research has been conducted regarding the interaction between the media and presidents, the changing media over time, and what role the media play in political scandal. Among many sources there is a consensus that the media's evolution has changed the way scandal is reported. By analyzing others' research on the subject, I seek to determine how various changes in the media have led to increased scrutiny of the personal lives and personalities of politicians.

The Evolution Of The Media

Journalist Douglass Cater once said "The American fourth estate operates as a de facto quasiofficial fourth branch of government, its institutions no less important because they have been developed...haphazardly" (Francke 1995: 110). Cater was describing the media and the role they play in American politics. Inarguably, the media have changed drastically in the postwar period, the years after the conclusion of World War II. The postwar period is an ideal starting point to examine the evolution of the media because it marks the start of modern media with the emergence of television. The entrance of the television into many American homes "transferred politics to the living room" (Gurevitch, et al. 2009: 136). Since the postwar period, the role of the media has changed drastically due to changes in the political climate as well as technological advancements.

Many scholars distinguish three distinct time periods in media phases in the postwar era, however they disagree about the particulars of each era. One school of thought is that the first phase in the 20th century can be described as the "objective media," spanning from the 1920s to through the early 1970s. Journalists during this media phase based their reporting on "fairness,

balance, and equity in coverage” (West 2001: 51). A more cynical point of view regards this period as an era of “lapdog journalism.” Occurring from about 1941 through 1966, lapdog journalism featured reporting that supported and bolstered the government’s word. The press protected politicians by neglecting to report on their private lives. They were not skeptical of information from politicians and “rarely challenged prevailing orthodoxy” (Sabato 1991: 25). In 1964, however, the Supreme Court case *New York Times v. Sullivan* gave the press further legal protection regarding libel, thereby protecting journalists except when they knowingly print falsehoods. In 1966, the Freedom of Information Act was passed, essentially giving the media a mandate to alter its role into an overseer of government conduct (Francke 1995). The civil rights movement and urban race riots also created unrest in “this world of complacent consensus” and encouraged greater media inquiry of government (Schudson 2011: 80).

The next phase of journalism occurred roughly between 1966 and 1974, termed “watchdog journalism” (Sabato 1991). This shift in the nature of the media is largely due to the growing distrust of government officials during the Vietnam War and the events of Watergate. Suddenly, deference to government and its officials was seen as laziness or naiveté (Schudson 2011). In a fundamental act of defiance, the *New York Times* began publishing the Pentagon Papers, a secret history of the Vietnam War, in 1971. When the Nixon administration tried to block further publication, the *Washington Post*, *Chicago Tribune*, and *Boston Globe* published more excerpts. Although the Nixon administration tried to use the courts to block publication, the Supreme Court ultimately ruled in favor of the newspapers and their First Amendment rights (Schudson 2011).

During this time journalists became independent investigators and exercised greater scrutiny of politicians. For the first time, the private lives of politicians were fit for public

discussion and the media began to “adopt more skeptical” attitudes toward politics (Gurevitch, et al. 2009: 165). During World War II and the Cold War, journalists and those they covered in government shared a certain bond; however, after Vietnam, journalists would never have the same relationship with government officials again (Schudson 2011). Finally, Watergate spawned investigative journalism and “active news gathering replaced the passive news receiving” of the previous era (Francke 1995: 116).

The final phase Sabato identifies began in 1974 and continues through present day. This “junkyard dog journalism” features harsh and aggressive reporting (1991). Reporters are intrusive and do not generally respect any sense of privacy. In this current phase, “greater competition among news outlets” and changes in technology have helped create the feeding frenzy mentality among the media (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012A: 215). Analysis and interpretation of the news became more commonplace among media elites as well. Furthermore, examining the personal background and character of public figures became accepted as a valid part of the news gathering process (West 2001). In addition to increasingly critical and cynical news, this phase marks the beginning of a national trend towards soft news (Schudson 2011). Soft news is “emotional and immediate” and carries little social significance compared to hard news (Bennett 2007: 21). Instead of focusing on policy issues, soft news includes lifestyle features, entertainment, and scandal coverage. A trend that started in local news stations in the 1970s, soft news has accelerated over the past decades and seeped into national mainstream media (Schudson 2011 and Bennett 2007).

Today, some scholars question the conceivability of mass media due to the ever-changing conditions in the media. Arguably, “the social and technological contexts” of present-day media are changing as swiftly as they did between the 1960s and the 1990s (Bennett and Iyengar 2008:

715). Furthermore, journalistic ethics and standards have changed, in large part due to economic motives. Driven by profit pressures, lifestyle features began to replace serious political reporting. The fear of public boredom led newspapers to focus on stories that would garner attention, such as scandals. These changes in content led to changes in moral standards. The media publicize scandal and offer commentary on those involved instead of simply reporting facts. The rise of political punditry in the 1980s further attracted viewers to news networks. By the mid-1990s, almost every major newspaper and news network featured pundits who offered instant analysis following major speeches and events (West 2001). Despite the obsession with politicians' private lives, current journalistic ethics still discourage the publication of graphic images and profanity. At the end of the 20th century, media empires experienced an “unprecedented growth surge” and these changes in morals and content became permanent (Bennett 2007: 222).

Changes forced upon the media by technological development have also affected journalists. Traditional, “old style” journalists have had to adapt to the changing media and the way political information is disseminated (Dagnes 2010: 105). Many believe the media, in an effort to be “efficient watchdogs,” are actually creating sensationalism (Puglisi and Snyder 2011: 934). The evolving, or perhaps devolving, culture among journalists has caused “public confidence in media, journalism, and information” to be very low (Bennett and Iyengar 2008: 713). Although the future of media ethics is uncertain, the line between old and new media, traditional and new journalists, has blurred (Schudson 2011).

Traditional Media

In the postwar era, print media and radio were the only media available. With the growing popularity of radio, newspaper editors felt threatened and fought to protect their readership (West 2001). The rise of television, however, completely changed the media landscape. Television, a major portion of today's traditional media, was the new media of the 1950s. Television foreshadowed its replacement of radio as the dominant form of media in the 1960 presidential debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy, the first to be televised (Steele 2012). This media brought politics into the home and provided more people access to the news (Gurevitch, et al. 2009). Television had significant consequences for political coverage and the power and influence of reporters. Just after television emerged, newspaper circulation levels decreased. While only 9% of American homes had a television set in 1950, that number would grow to 88% in 1960 and 95% in 1970 (West 2001). The popularity of television has made it somewhat difficult for print media to compete. Although television is the dominant media force, print media and talk radio remain important and influential in American politics (Dagnes 2010).

Today, print media is suffering from competition with broadcast and web media, with circulation numbers and ad revenues dropping (Dagnes 2010). Although print media has weakened, it remains alive. In order to be more competitive and save money, many newspapers and magazines have moved their content online. The *New York Times* and the *Wall Street Journal* were two of the first newspapers to offer online subscription services (Dagnes 2010).

Although traditional media, particularly broadcast media, still holds a grip on political distribution, the Internet may overtake television and other forms of traditional media in the near future. While ABC, CBS, and NBC still provide much of the news for Americans, “the

percentage of people who regularly watched network TV news dropped from 60 to 34” between 1993 and 2004 (Dagnes 2010 and Bennett 2007: 231). Some broadcast media are trying to adapt by uploading their content onto their websites, allowing their videos to go viral (Huffington 2009). Still, much of traditional media’s future successes will be dependent on the utilization of new media.

New Media

The rise of new media has fundamentally altered the way political information is disseminated and the way politics is conducted (Dagnes 2010). In its infancy, the Internet was used for micromedia (email) and middle media (web logs and automated meeting sites) and began to change political campaigning (Bennett 2007). As broadband and Wi-Fi increased the speed and access for users, usage of the Internet for news and political communication has also increased, with 50 million users looking at the news online per day in 2005 (Dagnes 2010). Although many people still use traditional media for news, “40% said the Internet was their main news source during the 2008 election” (Parmelee, et al. 2011: 625), a figure that has increased by 23% since 2004 (Gurevitch, et al. 2009). Furthermore, the Internet offers a low-cost, interactive, and politically focused form of communication that is especially appealing to younger people (Bennett 2007).

Although consumers now have “virtually unlimited sources of political information,” journalists are more limited in their gatekeeper role (Williams and Delli Carpini 2004: 1208). Many online news sites utilize “volunteer citizen journalists” who are not held to the same journalistic standard and level of accountability as professional journalists (Dagnes 2010: 28). While consumers may be happy with the greater number of sources available to them, a certain

amount of information overload occurs. Every slip, gaffe, and error made by politicians or other public figures are dispersed through the Internet and accessed by millions of consumers.

Although there are a greater number of political sources, new media has weakened the integrity of the information (Gurevitch, et al. 2009). Furthermore, the Internet has allowed readers to become the distributors of news and the line between “professional and amateur” has become blurry (Schudson 2011: 211). Manipulation of material has been made easier by new media and therefore much information available on the Internet has little credibility. Additionally, the advent of new media has propelled and satisfied consumers’ thirst for drama and scandal. Changes in the media have “eroded the distinction between news and entertainment” (Williams and Delli Carpini 2004: 1209). Even the distinction among tweet, blog post, and news story has blurred (Schudson 2011).

Although the Internet and new media have challenged the very core of journalism, “the impact of the Web is still in its childhood” (Schudson 2011: 205). Despite the wide array of sources, the majority of people who use the Internet for news still visit the sites of leading mainstream news organizations (Schudson 2011). Furthermore, even though new media has changed many characteristics of journalism, mass media still primarily shapes the political landscape (Bennett 2007).

Scandal

In order to analyze how the evolution of the media has altered the manner in which scandals are reported, we must first define “scandal.” For the purposes of this paper, I will focus on defining presidential scandals. When defining “presidential scandal,” three issues must be considered: the type of misbehavior, who committed the wrongdoing, and when the incident

occurred and was revealed. The players in the scandal must be members of the executive branch or a presidential nominee. Essentially, those involved in the scandal must be close enough to the president or high enough in the executive branch that the scandal bears relevance to the president's image (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012B). Furthermore, a scandal entails accusations of "illegal, unethical, or immoral wrongdoing" (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012A: 218).

Basinger and Rottinghaus, according to this definition, classify scandals into four categories: financial, political, personal, and international (2012A). Despite the notion otherwise, newspaper coverage of scandal is "on average quite small" and is often influenced by supply and demand factors (Puglisi and Snyder 2011: 932).

Unsurprisingly, scandals chronically appear in politics "across the democracies of the major industrial nations" (Bowler and Karp 2004: 274). Although the existence of a free press ensures the publicity of scandals today, it was not always the case in the United States. While financial affairs were always legitimate issues to cover, personal scandal was strictly off-limits. In the 1950s and 1960s sex was considered taboo and therefore the personal indiscretions of politicians were not printed, despite the media's knowledge of them (Sabato 1991). The "modern floodgates opened" with Chappaquiddick incident involving Ted Kennedy in 1969 (Schudson 2011: 88). Kennedy's behavior caused many journalists for the first time to consider the importance of private life and character in politics. Watergate, however, marks the start of the media's obsession with political scandal (Sabato 1991). The media and scholars often use Watergate as "a benchmark against which other scandals are to be compared" (Puglisi and Snyder 2011: 933). Despite the scrutiny of Richard Nixon's administration, he was one of the last presidents to benefit from the Franklin D. Roosevelt rule in which reporters practiced watchdog journalism but protected presidents' private lives. The press never revealed Lyndon B.

Johnson's drinking or attempts to woo women or Nixon's consultations with a psychotherapist in New York. In fact, only after John F. Kennedy's death were his sexual affairs revealed to the public due to government inquiry post-Watergate, not the media (Sabato 1991). Intrusive reporting reached its "pre-Monica Lewinsky zenith" in 1987 with the revelation of Democratic candidate for president Gary Hart's extramarital affairs (Schudson 2011: 88).

Watergate cemented the change in the style of reporting. During the 1970s, sex, alcohol, and drugs were established as legitimate subjects in political journalism. Furthermore, it placed the media in an agenda-setting role (Sabato 1991). The media have a certain influence on "citizens' evaluations of politicians, parties, and the political system" by reporting on scandals (Kepplinger, et al. 2012: 659). Scandals evolve in the first place when the media covers the accusations of a public figure of having violated a norm or having harmed someone or something. The media use frames, "organizing devices used to construct news stories," and cues, "labels and terms used to identify aspects of the news," to report scandals (Shah, et al. 2002: 341). Often times the media present only fragmentary frames and characterize damages in polarizing ways (Kepplinger, et al. 2012).

Today, media coverage is essential to modern scandal. The media and political elites must recognize a controversy as a scandal for it to further evolve. Furthermore, the media's labeling of a controversy as a scandal is the best indicator that elites believe some wrongdoing has occurred. The likelihood of that allegations of wrongdoing will be portrayed as a scandal depends on the political and news context. When there are few major stories available, the media is more likely to pursue a scandal. Conversely, during busy news periods, it is less likely that the mainstream media will pursue a scandal or give it prominent coverage (Nyhan 2009).

Furthermore, a low approval rating of the president among the opposition party increases the likeliness of a scandal onset. In order for a scandal to gain traction, the media and the opposition party must both work to create and sustain a presidential scandal. The media has professional and profit motives to investigate and expose alleged wrongdoing by the president or members of his administration. Journalists desire the prestige that can accompany the breaking of a scandal and media companies crave the increased consumer interest. The opposition party, of course, would like to discredit the president and damage his political capital (Nyhan 2009).

The final major factor that influences scandal coverage is the competition among media outlets. When there is a high level of competition, as exists today, journalists compete to report scandals first. Furthermore, the pressures of pack journalism encourage other journalists to report the same scandal news (Nyhan 2009). Thus, media feeding frenzies ensue with various media outlets competing for the most viewers and most updated information.

Although scandals often take on an agenda-setting role, they often only affect a president's popularity in the short term. In fact, most scandals last on average, six months. While personal and financial scandals are likely to last one month or less, political and international scandals last much longer. Furthermore, though many scandals do not receive front-page coverage in newspapers, any coverage of scandal "tends to reduce public trust" in our government and its institutions (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012A: 235). Some evidence indicates "newspapers with larger circulation systematically give more space to scandals," which helps explain the sensationalism of scandals (Puglisi and Snyder 2011: 932). In general, scandals receive more publicity than they "may deserve on the basis of their political consequence" (Bennett 2007: 12). Although watchdog is a legitimate role for the media, it has become uncontrollable with the availability of information in this new media age (Sabato 1991).

Methodology

The goal of this research is to answer a fundamental question in news media: What factors explain the increased scrutiny of the personal lives and personalities of political officeholders, specifically those of presidents? In order to explain increased significance of presidents' private matters and personalities to the media and public alike, I will use a case study approach to examine presidential scandals. For the purpose of this thesis, a presidential scandal is defined as allegations of illegal, unethical, or immoral behavior by the president or a member of the executive branch that is close enough to the president that his or her wrongdoing is relevant to the image of the president and his administration. I hypothesize that the intensified scrutiny of the character and personality of presidents can be explained by a combination of the competitive, aggressive media environment and the nature of the relationship between an individual president and the media.

In this thesis I will analyze three presidential scandals: Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Lewinsky scandal. These cases will be presented chronologically so that the analysis reflects the changes in the nature of reporting. When selecting these case studies, I controlled for the level of government which the scandal touched—presidential. Furthermore, I selected scandals that occurred in different decades in order to reflect variations in the mood and nature of the media, as well as to account for technological advancements.

The first case study I will examine is the Watergate scandal. This scandal began with a break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters in June of 1972. After considerable investigation, reporters from the *Washington Post* revealed that President Richard Nixon was directly involved in the break-in and subsequent cover-up. Ultimately, President Nixon resigned, the only U.S. president in history to do so. I selected to study this scandal not

only because of its individual significance, but also because of the impact it has had on media coverage of all future political scandals as well as the overall relationship between the media and those in the government.

The second case study, known as the Iran-Contra Affair, occurred in the 1980s during the second administration of President Ronald Reagan. The scandal was essentially an arms-for-hostages operation in which the United States unofficially sold arms to Iran in exchange for the release of hostages. The money from the arms sales was then funneled to support the rebels in Nicaragua, known as the Contras. I chose to study this scandal because it is unique in that President Reagan was not directly implicated in the scandal, although members of his senior staff were.

The Lewinsky scandal is the third case study I will examine. This scandal is significant, not only because it resulted in the impeachment of President Bill Clinton, but also because it was the first scandal to break on the Internet. Furthermore, this scandal revolved around a president's personal indiscretions rather than political missteps. Ultimately, this scandal and its subsequent media coverage set the tone for future reporting. Matters such as extramarital affairs, although considered immoral, were not previously regarded truly newsworthy by the mainstream media. Today, greatly due to precedents set at the close of the 20th century, matters small and large, personal and private are worthy of public consumption.

As my dependent variable I will use the level of scrutiny applied by the media to presidents' private lives and personalities. Level of scrutiny is defined as how carefully and intensely the media examines the relationships, finances, health, character, behavior, and personality of presidents. This will be measured qualitatively as low, medium, or high as opposed to quantitatively because I am more concerned with the tone and content of news stories

as opposed to the frequency. I chose this as the dependent variable because it reflects the media's changing standards regarding the appropriateness of various matters for publication.

The independent variables I will employ to explain the differences in levels of scrutiny applied to presidents' private lives include technology, the relationship between the media and the president, the use of anonymous sources, the level of competition among media outlets, and the availability of 24-hour news. I selected these dependent variables because they are essential lenses through which to examine changes in the media environment that might explain the level of scrutiny presidents face during scandals.

Technology refers to the modern machinery and equipment used by the media and includes, but is not limited to, the Internet, social media, and mobile telephones. This variable will be measured qualitatively as either present or nonexistent, taking into consideration the availability and usage of technology.

The relationship between the media and president is defined as the dealings and feelings that exist between the media and the president they cover. This variable will be measured qualitatively in terms of the perceived hostility between and personal dislike of each entity.

The use of anonymous sources refers to the media's publication of reports without attributing the information to specific persons or organizations. This variable will be measured qualitatively in terms of low, medium, and high usage.

The level of competition among media outlets refers to the number of media outlets available to consumers and the intensity of those outlets' profit motives. The level of competition among media outlets will be measured qualitatively in terms of low, medium, and high, based on the availability of news sources to the public.

The final variable, the availability of 24-hour news, is defined as the existence of the opportunity for the public to consume news at any hour of the day via various media platforms. This variable also refers to the type of news cycle present, as the availability of 24-hour news corresponds with the lack of a daily news cycle. This variable will be measured qualitatively as yes or no, referring to its existence.

A qualitative approach is best for this type of study and these variables because I wish to study specific scandals, rather than scandals or media coverage as a whole. Additionally, the purpose of this study is to understand the causes and particulars of the specific case studies selected. By analyzing these case studies, I am better prepared to understand future media coverage of scandals, as well as trends in the media.

Pre-Watergate Analysis

At the onset of World War II, journalists practiced “fairness, balance, and equity in coverage” (West 2001: 51). Opinions were supposed to be absent from articles and political commentary was considered inappropriate. While some scholars refer to this journalistic style as “objective media,” those more cynical call it “lapdog journalism” (West 2001; Sabato 1991). To a certain extent, World War II helped reinforce the type of journalism that did not seek to expose government officials or other public figures. The importance of national security and promoting the war effort outweighed any desire to investigate the government’s word. As time progressed and distrust grew among the American public, however, the media abandoned the government’s lap and increased its scrutiny of those who served the American people.

Technology

In the postwar era, radio and print media were the main sources of news information for American citizens until the emergence of television. As newspaper circulation decreased and television viewership increased, politicians began to tailor their messages to the television audience. As broadcast viewership increased, “television reporters became major political gatekeepers” (West 2001: 59). By 1960, the role of television in politics was so significant that the first televised presidential debate between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy was a pivotal event in Kennedy’s road to the White House. The sweating Nixon could not measure up to the youthful image of Kennedy broadcast across the country. Although radio listeners perceived Nixon to be the winner of the debate, Kennedy’s television performance ultimately won him the hearts of voters.

Relationship With The Media

Many scholars attribute the perpetual deterioration of the relationship between presidents and the media to the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal. These two events greatly fractured the sense of trust and common purpose between the media and those they covered. Prior to these turbulent times, the media practiced objective journalism and were described as the government's lapdogs.

Perhaps the best example of an objective or lapdog media is the relationship between the press and president John F. Kennedy in the early 1960s. The press has been accused of sheltering Kennedy due to their "cozy press relations" (Francke 1995: 119) and genuine adoration of the president. White House reporters were well aware of his adultery, as was his wife, Jacqueline. At the time, mainly male journalists composed the press and they were not critical of the president's private life because they believed it did not reflect on his ability to govern (West 2001). The media was not just a men's club; it was a club that was fiercely loyal to its poster boy.

In the 1950s and 1960s, sex was a taboo subject and the private lives of public figures were not open for public discussion (Sabato 1991). Major news outlets did not investigate Kennedy's private life, including his extramarital affairs or his health troubles, namely Addison's disease (Abramson 2013). Meanwhile, Kennedy's sexual escapades were growing more and more dangerous as he became too confident and reckless. Kennedy could be linked to women, not only across the country, but around the world, from an East German spy, Ellen Romestch, to White House interns, to call girls, to flight attendants (Sabato, 2013).

Whenever Jackie left Washington or Kennedy was abroad, the presidents' men brought in call girls, socialites, starlets, and stewardesses. Well aware of her husband's indiscretions, Jackie

tried to ignore or tolerate the affairs, while maintaining the image of a happy First Lady. In addition to the press and Secret Service, who often turned a blind eye, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was well aware of Kennedy's personal indiscretions, believing they constituted matters of national security. The FBI, under J. Edgar Hoover, had been tracking Kennedy's sexual liaisons since the late 1940s (Sabato 2013).

Although the FBI did not have legal cause to expose Kennedy, in today's world the White House press corps would never allow a president to behave so brazenly without rebuke. At the time, however, the press corps and Kennedy had a good relationship. Kennedy cultivated his relationship with the media, holding the first-ever televised news conferences during which he charmed reporters and viewers alike. Reporters genuinely liked Kennedy and he expected and cherished their loyalty. Firmly believing that Kennedy's private life was neither their business nor the public's, the media never printed or broadcasted a story about his infidelities. Kennedy's not-so-secret affairs became public due to government inquiry in the wake of Watergate, years after his assassination.

As the 1960s progressed, however, friction between peoples in the United States increased. Inner-city riots and the civil rights movement changed the complacent outlook the postwar era had created. Increased U.S. involvement in Vietnam stirred tension between citizens and their government, exacerbated by a distrustful press. Suddenly, journalists with cozy relationships with the president, a norm in Kennedy's White House press corps, were seen as lazy or naïve (Schudson 2011).

The deterioration of trust between the media and government ushered in the era of investigative journalism. This deterioration culminated in the publication of "a documentary history" of the United States' military involvement in the jungles of Vietnam (Apple 1996). The

publication of the Pentagon Papers fundamentally altered media-government relations and cemented the cynicism in the news media. Before Vietnam, “journalists and those they covered in government had shared in a sense of common purpose,” but that sense would never be recovered (Schudson 2011: 82). The government’s attempt to stifle freedom of the press “debased our constitutional processes” and the “democratic character and moral climate of our society” (McGovern 1972: 180). Vietnam and its many facets challenged the media in new ways and forced it to evolve. No longer the eager lapdog of government officials, the media began to produce the first true investigative reporters. The media began to apply greater scrutiny of the policy and records of politicians and government officials, as well as analyzed their character and personalities. Adopting skeptical attitudes, the media became critical and cynical.

The case of Vietnam “strengthened the role of journalists in communicating news to the public” (West 2001: 63). The American public began to feel that it could no longer trust the government to tell the truth. Officials had incessantly deceived not only the public, but even members of Congress. In the face of this deception, the public turned to the media for its inspection of government affairs, hoping it would discern the truth among lies. The government’s actions relating to Vietnam provided the media with just cause to probe further into governmental affairs and policy. The media’s sense of betrayal and mistrust greatly influenced its future coverage of the Watergate scandal, ultimately bringing down a president in shame.

Use Of Anonymous Sources

Throughout modern journalism, anonymous sources have been used in investigative reporting. A journalist’s promise of confidentiality or anonymity can persuade a potential source

to provide information without fear of punishment. In the pre-Watergate era of journalism, anonymous sources were used sparingly to ensure the credibility of the media outlet (Foerstel 2001). In this era, the American public believed the media to be very trustworthy and thus the media wielded considerable power as trust in the federal government declined (West 2001). Watergate and the famed anonymous source known as Deep Throat, however, would cause many in the media to increase their reliance on anonymous sources.

Competition Among Media Outlets

In this era, the competition among media outlets at the national level was very low. World War II produced the first celebrity journalists on the radio including Edward Murrow. Murrow became the voice associated with U.S. involvement in the war by making a series of radio broadcasts, most notably about the “horrors of the Battle of Britain, the massive German air raids on London” (West 2001: 56).

By 1950, 94% of American households had a radio. Those in the newspaper industry worried about the threat posed by radio and what it could mean for newspaper circulation as radio offered an immediacy that print media could not. After World War II, many major cities and towns had only one major newspaper, thus diminishing the media competition within those cities and towns. Now newspapers had virtual monopolies in their respective cities.

Soon, however, television emerged and threatened both radio and print media. For the first time, consumers could watch events as they happened, not just read or listen to a summary of events. In 1959, when television was still in its early stages, 57% of Americans named newspapers as their main source of news. Beginning in 1963 and for every year following, however, the majority of Americans cited television as their primary news source. Only 9% of

households had a television set in 1950. In 1960, just 10 years later, 88% of households had a television set (West 2001). As much as the newspaper industry wished, it could not compete with the growing power of television. Still, at the time three networks dominated television: ABC, NBC, and CBS. With such few channels available, the competition among national media outlets remained low.

Availability Of 24-Hour News

During this era, decades before the advent of the Internet or cable news networks, 24-hour news was not available. Instead, the daily news cycle prevailed. Daily newspapers were delivered in the morning, with the exception of evening newspapers. In addition to print media, consumers could watch a nightly news program on one of the few television channels available. The relatively fixed times that the media could publish or broadcast news may have dictated news content. With fixed space or airtime, media outlets had to act as effective gatekeepers.

Summary

In summary, I found that the new technology of the postwar era, television, dramatically altered the media landscape. The changes that television brought about can only be matched by the advent of the Internet in the early 1990s. As the number of television sets in U.S. households increased, the media's influence and political power grew.

Additionally, I found that presidents and other public figures benefitted from the media's respect for authority and deference to government officials until turbulence in the 1960s encouraged aggressive reporting. The White House Press Corps protected the private lives of the presidents they covered, never revealing extramarital affairs or health concerns. Even when the

media began to investigate and scrutinize the federal government's handling of the conflict in Vietnam, they left personal matters well alone.

Furthermore, I found that the usage of anonymous sources in the pre-Watergate era was low. During this time, the media was very well respected and found to be highly credible. Using anonymous sources would threaten the media's believability and capital with the public. The media relied on anonymous sources as sparingly as possible.

Additionally, I found that the level of competition among media outlets during this time was low. Although competition did exist between radio and print, and then between print and television, it did not dictate media content. Furthermore, with only three major networks and 95% of households with television sets in 1970, it was relatively easy for the media to reach viewers (West 2001).

Finally, without the availability of 24-hour news, the media adhered to a daily news cycle. The scheduled deliverance of news influenced the content of coverage because the news could not be updated every 20 minutes as it is today. Publishers and broadcasters were more likely to gather all the information available about a particular story because a retraction or update would have to wait until the following day.

Due to these factors, the scrutiny of the personal lives and personalities of political officeholders was low. In general, the media either liked the presidents they covered or, at the very least, respected the authority of the office. Furthermore, the available technology and low level of competition among media outlets did not encourage the type of scrutiny politicians in the future would endure.

Consequences

The pre-Watergate era, as defined for this thesis, encompasses more than two decades and thus confronted many changes in the media. In the aftermath of World War II, the media and those in the government shared a common purpose: serving the American people. The media relied on and believed the word of government officials and relayed this information to the public via print media and the radio. The emergence of the television transformed the media and the manner in which politicians operated, transferring politics to the living room. Still, the media worked with the government and respected its authority.

In the 1960s, however, the media assumed a watchdog role. They began to act as independent investigators and no longer accepted the word of the White House or other sources without outside corroboration. This change in the nature of reporting was motivated in part by the growing mistrust of the federal government during the Vietnam War. The publication of the Pentagon Papers made the media question their implicit trust of the government and encouraged reporters to apply greater scrutiny to its policies and actions.

Despite the increased aggressiveness of the media, political officeholders did not face scrutiny of their private lives or personalities. The media hammered Johnson on his failing foreign policy but never published stories about his extramarital affairs or drinking habits. The personal lives of presidents and other government officials were not considered legitimate aspects of the news. The media scrutinized the public actions and policies of politicians but steered clear of topics not appropriate for mass consumption. If today's media standards were applied to politicians of this era, it is very likely that many prominent politicians or even presidents would not have won election as they had far too many skeletons in the closet.

Case Study: Watergate

On June 17, 1972, five men were arrested on charges of burglary at the Democratic National Committee's (DNC) headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, DC. Although it garnered relatively little media and public attention at first, investigations of this break-in revealed a much greater conspiracy and cover up, ultimately causing President Nixon to resign in August of 1974. More so than any other event in modern American history, Watergate changed the nature of journalism and influences media coverage of scandal to this day.

In this chapter I will provide a brief synopsis of Watergate and analyze the scandal using the following variables: technology, relationship with the media, the use of anonymous sources, competition among media outlets, and the availability of 24-hour news. Using these variables to analyze Watergate will allow me to explain how the various contexts of this scandal affected its media coverage.

Synopsis

Most people in the media treated the Watergate break-in as a minor burglary and an isolated incident. Save for two zealous reporters and their editors at the *Washington Post*, much of the media paid little attention to the story after initially reporting on it. The *Washington Post*, however, continued almost daily coverage of the Watergate investigation throughout the second half of the year. By spring of 1973, Watergate commanded nationwide attention as it became clearer that the president of the United States was directly implicated in numerous crimes and subsequent cover-ups, along with his inner circle of advisers and aides (Liebovich 2003).

Upon arresting the burglars at the Watergate, the FBI found the contact information for E. Howard Hunt, a White House operative, in two of the burglars' address books. A couple days

later, officials publicly revealed that one of the burglars was a Republican security aide. The Nixon Administration was further linked to the break-in when a \$25,000 check for Nixon's re-election campaign was found in the bank account of one of the burglars and it was discovered that all five burglars were somehow tied to the Committee to Re-Elect the President.

On September 29, 1972 the *Washington Post* reported that while he was Attorney General, John Mitchell controlled a secret slush fund used to gather intelligence to use for Nixon's re-election campaign. By October, the FBI realized that the Watergate break-in was part of a larger series of political intelligence gathering and sabotage done on behalf of the Nixon re-election effort. Despite the brewing trouble, Nixon won the election in a landslide that November.

The next year would prove rough for Nixon as his administration became further implicated in numerous wrongdoings. In January 1973, two former Nixon aides were convicted of conspiracy, burglary, and wiretapping in the Watergate break-in case. Additionally, five other men pled guilty. In February, the U.S. Senate established a select committee to investigate Watergate. On March 23, 1973, Judge Sirica, of the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, who had presided over the trial of the Watergate burglars read a letter from one of the burglars, alleging that the burglars had perjured themselves and had been under pressure to remain silent. As the Senate committee readied to begin its hearings, several more Nixon aides either resigned or were fired.

In May 1973 the Senate began its televised hearings to investigate Watergate. The three major networks of the time alternated live coverage of the hearings, encouraging the engagement of the entire nation. During the testimony of a Nixon aide, the committee and the nation discovered the existence of a recording system in the White House that automatically recorded

conversations in various rooms. In July, Nixon refused the request of the special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, to submit the White House presidential tape recordings, prompting further judiciary involvement. Although the Senate hearings ended in August, Nixon still faced great pressure to turn over the recordings that would likely implicate him in the Watergate cover-up and countless other wrongdoings. Nixon claimed executive privilege but Cox refused to drop the subpoena for the tapes. Nixon's frustrations and fears culminated in what is known as the Saturday Night Massacre. On October 20, 1973, Nixon fired the attorney general and his deputy for their refusals to fire Cox. Eventually, he found someone who would abolish the office of the special prosecutor. Meanwhile, the struggle over the tape recordings continued. In December it was discovered that 18.5 minutes were missing from one of the subpoenaed recordings, yet no one from the Administration could provide a plausible explanation.

As 1974 progressed, it became clear that Nixon was losing his battle on all fronts. In March, the grand jury indicted seven former aides for conspiring to hinder the Watergate investigation. In April, the White House released edited transcripts of the tape recordings to the House Judiciary Committee but the committee continued demands for the tapes themselves. On July 24, 1974 the U.S. Supreme Court delivered the ultimate blow to Nixon: in a unanimous decision, the Court ruled that Nixon must give the tapes to the committee, dispelling his claims of executive privilege. A few days later, the House Judiciary Committee began the impeachment process, charging Nixon with obstruction of justice. On August 5, a tape recording from June 1972 was released, documenting the initial stages of the Watergate cover-up and Nixon's involvement, effectively destroying him. On August 9, Nixon resigned, the first president in American history to do so (*Washington Post*).

Technology

Although at first glance technology does not seem to play a role in this scandal, the lack of modern technology fundamentally altered the ways in which Watergate was reported. Prior to the advent of the Internet and mobile telephones, reporters relied on landline and payphones, typewriters, and taking notes by hand. Newsgathering, production, and distribution were low-technology processes that required much more time than is allotted in the industry today. For example, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post* relied on in-person interviews and handwritten notes. In order to discover for whom various conspirators worked, the reporters had to make dozens of phone calls to numerous organizations and attempt to piece bits of information together. Bernstein even flew to Miami to see Martin Dardis, the head investigator for the Dade County district attorney, to learn more about the check deposited into one of the burglar's bank accounts. Processes such as these take a fraction of the time today with online resources and databases. Additionally, Woodward's communication methods with Deep Throat, the famed anonymous source, were extremely primitive. They relied on unsophisticated signals such as a flag in a flowerpot or a note hidden inside a newspaper to signal a meeting needed to take place (Woodward and Bernstein 1974).

If modern technology had been available during Watergate, the timeline of coverage would likely have been condensed greatly. Hours spent tracking down names or searching through the White House's book requests at the Library of Congress would have been unnecessary if electronic records had existed. Furthermore, other media outlets might have covered Watergate in the same manner as the *Washington Post* did if the time commitment was not so great. President Nixon did not resign from office for more than two years after the break-in at the Watergate. Although government inquiries generally entail lengthy timeframes,

advanced technology would have permitted faster information gathering and thus implicated Nixon in the cover-up much sooner than 1974 (Woodward and Bernstein 1974).

Relationship With The Media

When Nixon entered office in 1969, the relationship between the media and government was in a new and tenuous position. Generally, American citizens wanted to believe in the morality of their officeholders and often found reassurance in the media. The press rarely challenged the word of government officials and often truly liked the politicians they covered.

When the 1960s brought turbulence and uncertainty, members of the media remained hesitant to publish anything that might detrimentally challenge the legitimacy of the government or its leaders. As the decade progressed, however, assassinations, anti-war demonstrations, and police skirmishes changed the national mood and encouraged an investigatory style of reporting (Bernstein 1976). Although this was not a particularly welcoming atmosphere for Nixon to enter office, he undoubtedly worsened the White House's relationship with the media.

Prior to assuming office, Nixon had determined how he would handle the press, and particularly the White House Press Corps. He viewed the press as an enemy that required vanquishing. In general, his strategy comprised of total avoidance of the press or inundating reporters with useless information. In practice this meant rarely holding press conferences and instead utilizing televised addresses. He believed this would prevent the media from distorting his message to citizens. Throughout his presidency, Nixon held only 39 press conferences, compared to the 65 Kennedy held during his brief time in office (Peters 2014). Many of these press conferences featured less than cordial interactions between him and members of the press corps. Additionally, the Nixon Administration used the FBI and the Central Intelligence Agency

(CIA) to investigate reporters whose undesirable stories caught the Administration's unwelcome attention. Consequently, some reporters were denied access to Nixon and his aides, further tainting the relationship between the Administration and the media (Spear 1979). White House officials also publicly attacked news organizations and their credibility in an effort to keep them responding defensively (Liebovich 2003).

Leading the crusade, Vice President Spiro Agnew repeatedly delivered scathing critiques of the media. His attacks began in the fall of 1969 during the Administration's first year. In speeches he verbally attacked television networks, claiming they were biased against Nixon. During a particular speech to a Republican audience, Agnew described the media as a closed group of unelected men who enjoyed a monopoly supported by the government. The speech, broadcast on all three major networks, was the first of its kind. Never before had someone holding such high political office assailed the national media. Throughout the fall, Agnew continued to attack the media, expanding his assaults to the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. Although Agnew sought to portray the White House as a victim, the Administration was vindictive and conniving (Liebovich 2003). Agnew's assaults on the media caused a contentious relationship to turn contemptuous.

Throughout his attempts to manipulate, intimidate, control, and evade the press, Nixon tried, unsuccessfully, to mask his contempt for the enemy. He strived to appear humorous but could never hide the bitterness he felt when conversing with the press. Regardless, Nixon correctly believed the dislike was mutual and that the media "found him personally distasteful" (Spear 1979: 41). Unlike the beloved Kennedy or the respected Johnson, the media found very few positive aspects of Nixon's personality. Even when the media reported on his

accomplishments, they were dissatisfied with his manner and style and viewed him through “an unforgiving lens” (Morgan 1996: 220).

Nixon and the media came to blows when the *New York Times* began publishing the Pentagon Papers on June 13, 1971. The Pentagon Papers, leaked to the press by Daniel Ellsberg, a special assistant to the assistant defense secretary, John McNaughton, revealed the Johnson Administration’s perpetual lies to Congress and the American people about the true nature of the ground war in Vietnam. The papers disclosed that Johnson suppressed crucial information from Congress when he presented the Gulf of Tonkin resolution in 1964. Furthermore, the papers revealed Johnson’s initiation of a “covert war against North Vietnam” long before the congressional resolution (McGovern 1972: 174). More unsettling was the revelation that “every president from Harry Truman on” was aware that the “ground effort in South Vietnam was hopelessly stalemated,” yet the war continued (Ellsberg 2001).

Tension between the government and the press peaked when the Nixon Administration ordered the *New York Times* to halt further publication of the damaging document after three articles appeared in the paper. When the *Washington Post* and other media outlets began publishing the report, the Nixon Administration sought further injunctions (Liebovich 2003).

This marked the first time in history the federal government imposed prior restraint on the press for the sake of national security. On June 30, 1971 the Supreme Court ruled in a six to three decision that the *Times* and other papers could resume publication immediately (Apple 1996).

In response to these damaging leaks, Nixon created a secret “plumbers” unit to investigate the leaks from within the executive branch. This group was responsible for invading homes and offices such as the psychiatrist of Daniel Ellsberg (Liebovich 2003). Ironically, these “plumbers” were the same men arrested at the Watergate office complex, instigating media and

government inquiry, and ultimately causing Nixon's downfall. Nixon's handling of the Pentagon Papers was the precursor to Watergate and illustrates that he was always his own worst enemy.

Nixon's treatment and handling of the media ultimately contributed to his undoing. Perhaps if the media genuinely liked him, Nixon might have escaped some of the harshest public criticisms and may have left office with more of his reputation intact. Instead, as the accusations of wrongdoing accrued, "the piranhas moved in" (Morgan 1996: 220). The White House, however, did not take the accusations lightly. When the *Washington Post* began reporting on Watergate, Nixon did not hesitate to threaten economic retaliation against the newspaper. The paper felt significant pressure to cease publication as the Administration effectively boycotted it, leaving phone calls unreturned and denying the *Washington Post* access to various White House events and functions. The Administration's vicious relationship with the paper extended from the professional to the personal when Carl Bernstein called Attorney General John Mitchell to discuss some new developments. Upon hearing about the upcoming story, Mitchell threatened, "Katie Graham's [publisher of the *Washington Post*] gonna get her tit caught in a big fat wringer if that's published" (Graham 1997). The manner in which the White House responded to the *Washington Post*'s reports exemplifies the detestation and utter lack of respect the Nixon Administration felt for the media.

The greatest irony in this scandal, however, is the role of television in Nixon's downfall. He preferred to circumvent the press and speak to citizens directly via televised addresses. Throughout this scandal, nothing was more damning for Nixon than the televised Senate hearings; neither the newspaper articles nor the network broadcasts damaged his name as much. Nixon was defeated by his preferred method of public communication and continuously proved he was his own greatest enemy. Unlike previous presidents, the media had little respect for

Nixon personally and did not take issue with exposing his personal faults and illegalities.

Although many variables factored into the undoing of Nixon, his toxic relationship with the media undoubtedly encouraged increased scrutiny of his wrongdoings.

Use Of Anonymous Sources

Media coverage of the Watergate scandal saw an increase in the usage of anonymous sources. For example, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post* rarely used sources that provided their information on the record (Liebovich 2003). Although the traditional rules of journalism recommend against using anonymous sources, in this case, guaranteed anonymity was likely the only way reporters could secure information. While anonymous sources were rarely used prior to Watergate, this scandal produced the most famous of anonymous sources: Deep Throat. Named for a pornographic movie of the time, Deep Throat provided significant information that linked Nixon with the Watergate cover-up to the *Washington Post's* Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward (Shepard 1994). In 2005, Deep Throat revealed himself: Mark Felt, the former Deputy Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). Anonymity allowed him to provide information from the FBI's investigation that the reporters would have never otherwise acquired.

Although the *Washington Post* relied on greatly on anonymous sources, editors at the newspaper did not approve the use lightheartedly. Managing editor Ben Bradlee was uneasy relying on Deep Throat and publishing stories without naming or even alluding to sources. In order to relieve some of his concerns, Woodward and Bernstein revealed to Bradlee the identity of Deep Throat, making him only the fourth person with this privileged information. Bradlee had to trust Woodward and Bernstein, a feat that did not come easy. Fortunately, Bradlee and his

reporters' guts proved right and Deep Throat's information was accurate (Woodward and Bernstein 1974).

Watergate legitimized the use of anonymous sources in the mainstream media. Although anonymous sources had been used by the media pre-Watergate, reporters did so sparingly. Before publishing an incriminating story, editors wanted greater assurance than the information from an anonymous source (Foerstel 2001). It is likely that the *Washington Post* was able to essentially monopolize coverage of this scandal because other media outlets were much more hesitant to use anonymous sources. While usage of anonymous sources was at a medium level during Watergate, usage increased dramatically in the post-Watergate years.

Competition Among Media Outlets

Initially, the Watergate scandal began as newspaper reports of the arrest of five men on charges of second-degree burglary. Most media outlets did not pursue the story because they did not believe one existed. Many regarded the break-in as a minor crime perpetrated by some low-level members of the Committee to Re-Elect the President (Morgan 1996). Watergate had such low public saliency that it did not play a role in the 1972 presidential election, enabling Nixon to win re-election in a landslide. Despite, or perhaps due to, the lack of interest in the story, the *Washington Post* was able to corner the market on the scandal.

Of more than 400 Washington correspondents representing various media outlets, only 15 devoted their full attention to Watergate between the June break-in and the November election (Schudson 2004). Two of those reporters, Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward of the *Washington Post*, accounted for the plurality of printed Watergate reports in the latter half of 1972. The *Washington Post* printed an article about Watergate almost every day and usually published it on

page one. These reports were often investigative in nature but garnered little attention from the public and prompted little response from other media outlets. Many outlets believed that Washington was too competitive as a news town and that the *Washington Post* had taken the lead and could not be overcome (Liebovich 2003). Not until March 1973, when one of the burglars claimed they had perjured themselves, did other media outlets realize there was a story that had national significance (Schudson 2004).

The commencement of the televised Senate hearings encouraged not only the public, but also the media, to focus attention on the unfolding scandal. Although the *Washington Post* had kept the Watergate story alive, the television coverage of the hearings produced the most drama. Anticipating millions of viewers during the hearings, the three major news networks of the time agreed to share broadcasting rights. Furthermore, many in the media began questioning Nixon's role in the cover-up. Suddenly, Watergate was everywhere, with newspapers publishing front-page headlines concerning Watergate for two months during the summer of 1973. The *New York Times* joined the competition and carried a front-page story every day but three from May through July (Liebovich 2003). Generally, editors at the *New York Times* were very cautious regarding the publication of information in an ongoing grand jury investigation. During this time, however, they discarded their precautions because “the market was so hot” (Feldstein 2007). This intense competition also encouraged the use of anonymous sources and less stringent fact-checking procedures. The coverage of the scandal was so in-depth and frequent due to the competitive nature of the news industry. In order to remain relevant, media outlets had to extensively cover Watergate. Although the competition among media outlets encouraged increased coverage of the scandal, the coverage did not greatly scrutinize Nixon's personality or character, but rather his actions as president. Though the nature of the coverage was

investigatory, the investigation largely focused on Nixon's illegal actions and the crimes committed by various government officials. Furthermore, although the level of competition was low by modern standards, it perpetuated the scandal with constant and comprehensive coverage.

Availability Of 24-Hour News

While 24-hour news was not available at this time, its absence undoubtedly changed how coverage of Watergate was produced and distributed. With the availability of 24-hour news, cable news networks can cover breaking stories at any hour of the day or night. Initial articles detailing the break-in at the Watergate complex, however, were published in the following day's newspapers. Since the burglary occurred overnight, the earliest the media could break the story was in the morning newspaper. If cable news had existed and 24-hour news had been available, networks would have interrupted their regular programming to cover the break-in at Watergate. Furthermore, Watergate would have been a salient issue for the public if the scandal saturated news programming as political scandals do today. Instead, many people were unaware of the unfolding drama until the televised Senate hearings began.

Continuing coverage of the scandal was also altered by the absence of 24-hour news because news updates were only published once or, at most, twice daily. The *Washington Post* led with coverage of the scandal, yet they only produced an average of one article per day throughout the saga (Liebovich 2003). If 24-hour news had been available, cable network coverage of the scandal would have been continuous, whether new information had been discovered or pundits were simply reiterating the facts. Despite the absence of 24-hour news, the printed media was able to perpetuate the drama. If Watergate occurred today, it is unlikely that a

single newspaper would receive as much credit for its role as the *Washington Post* did in the early 1970s.

Summary

In summary, I found that the effect of technology was more consequential due to the lack of computers, the Internet, and mobile telephones. Nixon's demise would have likely occurred sooner than it did if the media had been able to eliminate countless hours of manual research and face-to-face interviews. The lack of modern technology impeded the media's ability to scrutinize Nixon and his aides.

Additionally, a deteriorating relationship between the media and the government highly influenced the coverage of and interest in the Watergate scandal. The relationship was suffering before Nixon assumed office due to the media's mistrust of government officials as a result of the United States' involvement in Vietnam. Although the relationship had turned sour, much of the media still tried to preserve a sense of stability and ethicality of the system. Nixon's personal vendetta against the media, however, severely worsened this relationship. He and his aides actively sought to mislead and manipulate the press and therefore, the press did not hesitate to fault him, as they would have hesitated before publishing damning information about Kennedy or even Johnson. Nixon's personal relationship with the media became toxic and ultimately contributed to his poor evaluation as not only a president, but as a man of character.

Furthermore, I found that the usage of anonymous sources during coverage of Watergate was at a medium level and did not play as significant of a role as has been romanticized in subsequent accounts of the scandal. Although Deep Throat is one of the most famous of anonymous sources, Woodward and Bernstein could not simply rely on the information he

provided. While Deep Throat's privileged intelligence allowed the *Washington Post* to continue its almost daily coverage of Watergate throughout the summer of 1972 and pointed the reporters to the upper echelons of the federal government, the reporters had to do a great deal of investigative work on their own.

Moreover, I found that while the level of competition among media outlets was relatively low when compared to today's standards, it did affect and encourage coverage of the scandal. Perhaps the biggest winner of Watergate was the *Washington Post*, which was able to establish itself as a major news competitor and even a rival of the *New York Times*. I found the level of competition to be low because for the better part of a year, only the *Washington Post* provided daily coverage of the scandal. If the competition had truly been greater, more outlets would have offered constant coverage to compete with the *Post*.

Finally, I found that the absence of 24-hour news slowed the media's distribution of scandal coverage. Since cable news networks did not exist, nightly news and daily newspapers were the main producers of Watergate coverage. Furthermore, the absence of 24-hour news inhibited the media's ability to greater scrutinize Nixon. While newspapers and nightly news must use their space and time judiciously, cable news affords vast amounts of time for political commentary.

Although these factors contributed to increased scrutiny of the personal lives and personalities of political officeholders, scrutiny at this time was still low. The press did not like Nixon personally, however, media coverage of Watergate still focused on Nixon's illegal actions relating to the cover-up. Not until after Nixon had resigned in disgrace did the media focus on his personality and morality or question his competency as a president. Watergate would ultimately have greater consequences for subsequent presidents than Nixon alone.

Consequences

By the end of the Watergate saga, a president had resigned for the first time in American history and more than 70 individuals within his administration had been sentenced for their crimes (Morgan 1996). President Ford, hoping to heal the nation and leave Watergate in the past, pardoned Nixon before he was indicted. Instead of healing the nation, Ford's actions left many questioning his motives in the aftermath of a great government cover-up. Despite Ford's efforts, Watergate would continue to plague politicians and the media alike as an era of robust investigative journalism ushered in new rules for the media.

Watergate galvanized the media, making heroes of investigative journalists who sought to expose corruption, indiscretion, and immorality. Although the Vietnam War and social unrest in the 1960s had altered the mood among the media prior to Watergate, turning realists into cynics and lapdogs into watchdogs, this scandal further disillusioned the media and the public. As a result of what is widely regarded as one of the most significant constitutional crises in American history, citizens' trust in the federal government plummeted (Schudson 2004). Furthermore, Watergate inspired retroactive investigations of previous administrations and uncovered abuses during the Kennedy and Johnson eras (Morgan 1996). Kennedy and Johnson had benefited from a more deferential press, one less likely to challenge the system or its leaders (Schudson 2004).

Watergate, however, piqued the interest of the media, government, and public in the activities of previous presidents. Notably, the American public became aware of Kennedy's illicit affairs and poor health conditions due to government inquiry in the post-Watergate era (Sabato 1991).

While history had often regarded Kennedy and his administration positively and optimistically, many came to question some of his actions in the aftermath of Watergate.

Upon the resignation of a president they detested and the exposé of corrupt federal government employees, many in the media felt that journalism was Watergate's only winner. The media's successes throughout the scandal encouraged journalists to continue their investigatory style of reporting. This scandal inspired journalists to seek out scandals and offered a public platform to discuss the personal and professional corruption of government officials. The media were interested in pursuing scandal and the public enjoyed consuming this type of news. Watergate also created a governmental structure to pursue scandal investigations. For example, the special prosecutor's office was created in response to Watergate and would later play a pivotal role in the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal (Schudson 2004). Because of Watergate, the government had formal institutions that encouraged the media's zest for scandal. Furthermore, the media began to focus more on the personalities and personal lives of politicians rather than substantive policy issues (Morgan 1996). This era might mark the beginning of the media's devolution from reporting matters of substance to soft news. The news industry realized there was a market for rumor and gossip that had been previously untapped. Watergate inspired journalists to expose the personal faults of politicians as opposed to the faults of government policies. Most significantly, in terms of future scandals, Watergate encouraged the media to question the competency and fitness for office of politicians. While personality and content of character had previously taken a back seat to factors such as experience or stances on issues, they became central factors in determining a politician's ability.

Even today, Watergate remains a model and point of reference for subsequent political scandals. The scandal has such relevance and significance that members of the media often add "-gate" to the ends of other scandal names to emphasize the seriousness of the situation (Schudson 2004). Furthermore, politicians today continue to pay for Nixon's misdeeds.

Watergate is forever burned in to the collective memory of the United States where its legacy threatens to out corrupt politicians and reveal their darkest secrets.

Case Study: Iran-Contra

On October 5, 1986 a C-123 cargo plane crashed in Nicaragua, shot down by Sandinista soldiers. Of the four men on board, only one survived and he acknowledged that he was working on behalf of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). This plane crash alerted the media and Congress to what came to be known as the Iran-Contra Affair. Unlike the other case studies examined in this thesis, Iran-Contra comprises two distinct scandals in the realm of foreign policy. As a result, the media were ill equipped to cover the scandal.

By analyzing Iran-Contra, I hope to explain why this scandal did not result in greater scrutiny of Reagan's character or mental faculties. With improvements in technology and the recent availability of 24-hour news, Iran-Contra should have been a greater detriment to Reagan, yet he managed to avoid severe retribution.

Synopsis

The Iran-Contra Affair tells the story of two separate scandals in two different hemispheres intertwining to form a complicated foreign policy mess. The first scandal involved the covert supply of arms to moderate Iranian factions. Although this policy violated U.S. law, the Reagan Administration hoped the arms sales would help secure the release of American hostages held by the Lebanese terrorist group Hezbollah. At first, the United States used Israel as an intermediary for the arms sales. Israel would ship weapons to Iran and the United States would reimburse Israel with the same weapons. Additionally, the United States received monetary reimbursements for the sales. During the summer of 1985, Israel shipped more than 500 antitank weapons to Iran and thus secured the release of a hostage. In January of 1986, Reagan secretly authorized a new policy that permitted the direct sale of arms to the Iranian

government. Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North, a staff member of the National Security Council, acted as the go-between for the national security adviser and Iran.

The second scandal involved the secret funding of rebels in Nicaragua. These rebels, known as Contras, were fighting against the Marxist Sandinista regime. In 1982, Congress passed a law prohibiting the CIA from funding the overthrow of the Sandinista regime. In 1984 Congress passed another law to prohibit any federal agency or entity of the United States from spending money on behalf of the Contras. This second scandal violated these laws, known as the Boland Amendments. North orchestrated the diversion of earnings from the arms sales to a retired general who arranged weapon purchases and deliveries to the Contras.

The media, and thus subsequently, the public, became aware of the covert operations upon the crash of the cargo plane in Nicaragua in October 1986. Eugene Hasenfus, the sole survivor of the crash, acknowledged that he was part of a CIA operation and named two of his superiors in a press conference. After the crash, the Reagan Administration denied any connection to the mission of the C-123 plane. During the weeks following the crash, the Administration continued to stonewall the media, leaving many questions unanswered. In November 1986, Iranian opponents of the secret relationship between the United States and the Ayatollah planted an article in a Lebanese magazine, exposing details of the secret arms deals. In response, Reagan made a speech to the nation and held a press conference but evaded most questions. During a second press conference Reagan let his attorney general, Edwin Meese III take questions. Meese then announced the diversion of the money from the Iranian arms sales to the Nicaraguan Contras. He also announced the resignations of North and Admiral John Poindexter, the national security adviser (Downie and Kaiser 2002).

Although the Iran-Contra Affair resulted in the conviction of 11 individuals, Reagan managed to escape the fate of Nixon. Reagan continued to proclaim that the United States did not trade arms for hostages or negotiate with terrorists. Furthermore, he did not acknowledge his authorization of the arms shipments to Israel until the publication of his autobiography in 1990. Unlike the White House tapes in Watergate, neither the media nor Congress could find the “smoking gun” that would cause a president to resign. Additionally, investigators could not prove that Reagan knew of the aid to the Contras. Although he appeared at best ignorant and at worst willfully negligent, Reagan left office at the end of two terms with his reputation in tact (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012B).

Technology

Once again, technology does not play as significant a role in this scandal as does the absence of modern technology such as the Internet and social media. The media faced difficulties covering Iran-Contra because they relied profoundly on official sources for matters of foreign affairs. Without the Internet the media had far less access to foreign media outlets and governments. Although major media outlets had foreign correspondents, they likely pursued stories based on the information received from official U.S. sources. Because official U.S. sources were determined to keep the arms sales and the diversion of funds secret, the media had few means to discover the affair until the cargo plane crashed in Nicaragua.

Furthermore, since the media lacked Internet technology, they also lacked other technological resources that are commonplace today such as social media. In some countries with unreliable state-owned media, social media platforms like Twitter can provide great insight into the events occurring within the country. If Twitter had been available during the Iran-

Contra affair, the media might have discovered the arms sales from the tweets of Israelis or Iranians involved in the sales. Due to the absence of modern technology, the media had to rely on the U.S. government to provide information once the arms sales were discovered. The Reagan Administration, however, did not cooperate well with media and government inquiries. The Administration refused to declassify information crucial to the prosecution of North and in general left many mysteries regarding the president's personal role in the affair (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012B).

Technology did play a minor role in the Reagan Administration, however. All offices within the Administration had access to a computer network over which the communications messages of the day were sent. The Administration managed the news by ensuring that all within the Administration who spoke to the media conveyed the same message, thus expressing the cohesiveness of the White House. In this case, computer technology was instrumental throughout the Iran-Contra Affair. Although the media pursued Reagan, determined to implicate him in the scandal, the Administration's messaging proved effective. This technology allowed Reagan to remain a step ahead of the media (Bennett 2007).

Relationship With The Media

By the time Reagan entered office in 1981, the media had long considered themselves society's watchdog and the protectors of democracy. Just a couple months into his presidency, Reagan survived an assassination attempt, prompting the media to become friendlier and deferential towards him (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012B). Still, the media remained critical of Reagan and his administration but failed to achieve the same notoriety as they did in the Nixon

White House. Although Reagan did not regard the press with as much hatred as Nixon did, he and his White House did attempt to manipulate the media and manage the news.

Known as the Great Communicator and the Teflon President, Reagan was extremely comfortable with the press and seemed to be immune to criticism. As a former actor, he was accustomed to being on television and possessed a certain charm that not all presidents can claim. When the press attacked him, Reagan did become hurt or angry but instead ignored the attack. Unlike the aggressive Nixon, the media found it difficult to provoke the easygoing Reagan. When they attempted to, the media appeared rude and antagonistic, not investigative and responsible. In general, Reagan was a popular president whose reputation could not be easily tarnished by the media.

In addition to his personal charm, Reagan and his administration employed an effective media management strategy. In many regards the Reagan Administration appears to be the presidential authority on managing the news. Policy officers and press handlers routinely met to discuss and plan long-term strategies for setting the news agenda. All offices within the Administration received the line of the day via an internal computer network to ensure everyone conveyed the same message to the press. This technological revolution began under the Carter Administration but was expanded under Reagan (White House Historical Association 2014). The president and his administration would feed the media the same message repeatedly so that they could shape their media coverage. Some within the Administration would also contact members of the press to do spin control and further hammer in their message. Furthermore, Reagan traveled with a large White House Press Corps and granted the media greater access than had been allowed under Nixon. Unlike the Nixon Administration, the Reagan Administration effectively managed the media, perhaps because the relationship was not quite as strained.

Although Reagan's relationship with the media was not necessarily hostile, the media did not give him a free pass. They wanted to exercise moderation in the aftermath of Watergate, yet still pursue the scandal. Criticisms of Reagan seldom stuck; his popularity dipped during the scandal but rebounded before he left office (Bennett 2007).

Despite the media's desire to expose or topple a president once again, they did not attack Reagan in the same way they had attacked Nixon. Coverage focused on Reagan's honesty and whether or not he lied about being unaware of the diversion of funds from the arms sales to the Contras. The media should have focused on the constitutional issues of the scandal (Hertsgaard 1990). The president had failed to notify Congress of the arms sales to Iran, as required by law. Furthermore, funding the Contras violated the Boland Amendments. Despite these illegalities, the media only questioned Reagan's credibility, not his objectives (Cavender, et al. 1993). In this case, Reagan benefited from his easier relationship with the media and avoided the scrutiny of his character.

Use Of Anonymous Sources

Throughout my research, I could not find specific references to the media's use of anonymous sources in their coverage of this scandal. It is important to note, however, that the media increased its reliance on and usage of anonymous sources in the post-Watergate years (Foerstel 2001). Although I found no explicit references, it would not be an unfounded assumption to say that anonymous sources were likely used to cover Iran-Contra.

Competition Among Media Outlets

The landscape of the media was fundamentally altered when media mogul Ted Turner founded Cable News Network (CNN) in 1980. Unlike any existing networks, CNN offered 24-hour news and thus changed media production and consumption. Although other cable news networks that rivaled CNN were not founded until the 1990s, the emergence of cable news increased competition among media outlets and caused the declining importance of print media today. Furthermore, CNN altered the role of the three major news networks. Although the three major networks agreed to rotate daily live coverage of the Iran-Contra congressional hearings, as they did for coverage of the Watergate hearings, CNN provided continuous live coverage of the hearings (*New York Times* 1987). Viewers with access to CNN no longer had to switch between networks each day and could watch the hearings without ever changing the channel.

In addition to the emergence of CNN, the number of media outlets in general expanded. In the aftermath of Watergate, the media's determination to fulfill a watchdog role caused a primal atmosphere among media outlets. Although the media strove to be hyper-vigilant, they remained completely unaware of the Iran-Contra affair until the plane crash in Nicaragua. Both the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* published articles about North in the summer of 1985 describing his role in helping the Contras after passage of the Boland Amendment, yet they and the rest of the media remained ignorant of the arms-for-hostages deal (Downie and Kaiser 2002). After the plane crash, the media resumed its aggressive, investigative, and adversarial style (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012B). Analyses of news content during the scandal show the media was critical of the Reagan Administration, with approximately 22 percent negative coverage (Brown and Vincent 1995). Despite a medium level of competition among media outlets, Reagan managed to keep his reputation intact. The undetermined extent of Reagan's

knowledge about the arms-for-hostages deal shaped media coverage but failed to implicate him directly. The narrative of media coverage and the quest for the smoking gun helped contain the consequences for Reagan because the media could not pin the scandal on Reagan's actions alone (Cavender et al. 1993).

Availability Of 24-Hour News

Although the first 24-hour news network, CNN, was available during the Iran-Contra Affair, 24-hour news in general did not affect media coverage. Traditional nightly news still provided the majority of news to Americans, hovering upwards of 45% of viewers (Guskin and Rosentiel 2012). Furthermore, print media still played an important role in the industry. Ultimately, the availability of 24-hour news was at a low level and did not affect coverage of the scandal nor scrutiny of the president as cable news would in the future.

Summary

In summary, I found that the medium level of technology had a great effect on media coverage of the Iran-Contra Affair. The scandal would have been discovered much sooner if the media had been able to use the Internet and have greater access to foreign sources. Instead, the media relied greatly on official U.S. sources that were ultimately deceiving. Although the media did not benefit from technology in this case, the Reagan Administration was able to effectively use an internal computer network to provide offices with communications strategies. This enabled the Administration to remain on message and successfully feed the media the line of the day, thus managing the news.

Additionally, I found that although the media did not love Reagan as they did Kennedy, they did not loathe him as they did Nixon. Despite the Reagan Administration's obvious attempts to manage the news, the media was never treated as an enemy. Throughout the scandal Reagan's objectives were never questioned, even though the Administration stonewalled the media at every turn. Reagan benefited from a media exercising moderation in the aftermath of Watergate and his own charming personality.

Furthermore, I found that while anonymous sources likely factored into coverage of this scandal, they did not play a significant enough role to warrant scholarly mention. This could be, however, a result of the use of anonymous sources becoming commonplace journalistic practice.

Regarding the competition of media outlets, I found that the expansion of media outlets prompted greater competition, at a medium level, and thus increased coverage of the Iran-Contra Affair. Media coverage of the Reagan Administration was fairly negative, yet the media could not definitively link Reagan himself to the diversion of arms sales profits to the Contras. Thus, the narrative of this media coverage benefitted Reagan and he was able to escape the Nixon-esque scrutiny.

Finally, I found that the emergence of the first 24-hour news network, CNN, fundamentally altered the media landscape but did not affect scandal coverage as much as it would in future presidential scandals. In the 1980s, network news and print media remained competitive, although viewership and circulation numbers were declining. Ultimately, however, the availability 24-hour news did not cause increased scrutiny of Reagan's personality or his character.

Consequences

The Iran-Contra Affair ended with much less excitement than did Watergate. The House of Representatives did not bring charges of impeachment against Reagan, nor did he need to consider resignation. While 11 individuals within the Administration and employees of federal agencies were convicted as a result of the affair, Reagan was spared the brunt of the scrutiny. Ultimately, the entire scandal came to be viewed as a minor blemish on Reagan's reputation. Although his approval rating suffered during the scandal, he left office with pre-scandal numbers. Furthermore, the media's interest in the affair diminished, in part due to the Administration's effective stonewalling efforts (Basinger and Rottinghaus 2012B). Unlike Watergate, Iran-Contra did not revolutionize media coverage of scandals. In fact, the Watergate narrative backfired against the media when it could not produce the same results.

Furthermore, Iran-Contra presented a unique challenge to the post-Watergate media because the scandal occurred in the realm of foreign affairs. The media almost missed the scandal entirely because the illegal activities transpired in foreign countries. When the *Washington Post's* senior diplomatic correspondent met with members of the National Security Council in early 1986 regarding a tip he had received about a possible arms deal in Iran, the officials lied to him (Downie and Kaiser 2002). The arms deal did not become a story until connections were made between Iran and the plane crash in Nicaragua. Cases of national security and international affairs presented obstacles to media investigation because the media did not have access to the necessary information. These difficulties spared Reagan the brunt of the media's scrutiny because they could not scrutinize his actions or motives if they did not understand what had transpired. When the Reagan Administration stonewalled on the arms-for-

hostages trade, the media eventually lost interest, unable to prove what information Reagan knew and when he knew it.

Ultimately, neither the media nor the congressional investigators, known as the Tower Commission, could produce the smoking gun that would directly implicate Reagan in the arms-for-hostages deal. In its report, the Tower Commission depicted Reagan as an aloof and distant president, ignorant of his aides' secret dealings. Although the report criticized Reagan, it placed most of the blame on his aides who attempted to minimize the president's role in the affair. Furthermore, the profits from the arms sales could not be traced, nor could it be proved that they had been diverted to the Contras. Most significantly, the commission could not find evidence that Reagan knew of the diversion of funds (Roberts 1987). The media was unable to provide evidence that Reagan knew of the operation to fund the Contras, either. They tried to frame Iran-Contra as another Watergate, a case of an elaborate presidential cover-up, but failed to deliver the necessary evidence to prove Reagan had broken the law. To the media's dismay, the Watergate analogy benefited Reagan, rendering him innocent due to the lack of an equivalent to Nixon's damning White House tapes (Sabato 1991).

Although changes in the media environment after Watergate seemed to ensure increased scrutiny of the highest office in the United States, somehow Reagan managed to escape with barely a blemish on his Teflon coating. Why did Reagan not suffer the same fate as Nixon? The circumstances around the two scandals differed incredibly. Firstly, Watergate was a much simpler story. Although the crimes occurred over many years and were committed by members of the upper echelons of the federal government, they occurred on U.S. soil. Furthermore, the media had greater access to investigation materials because, unlike in Iran-Contra, they did not concern matters of national security. Undoubtedly, Iran-Contra was a more complicated scandal

not only because its activities occurred in other countries, but also because the comprehension of complex foreign policy was that much more difficult to achieve. The media were too many steps behind the scandal in the first place.

As a result of these complexities, the media was not the driving force behind investigating the scandal, as they were in the investigation of Watergate. Arguably, media coverage of the Watergate break-in and subsequent revelations as result of investigative reporting led to the congressional hearings that led to Nixon's demise. Media coverage of Iran-Contra, however, mostly occurred as a reaction to the congressional hearings commissioned by Reagan. This sequence of events might be another reason as to why Reagan did not endure the same media scrutiny as Nixon; the media did not have the same grip on the scandal as it did during Watergate. Despite a media environment that should have created more difficulties for Reagan's presidency, he remained afloat and intact. For various reasons, including his charming personality and lack of direct implication in the scandal, the media did not scrutinize Reagan's personality or his character as much as it might have or should have, given the serious consequences of the scandal. Although the Reagan Administration broke laws and compromised U.S. foreign policy, the media, perhaps still becoming accustomed to their new rules, failed to either recognize or convey the severity of Iran-Contra.

Case Study: Lewinsky Scandal

During his second term in office, President Bill Clinton faced a scandal unlike any of the previous scandals or allegations he had to face. In the midst of a sexual harassment case, Clinton was accused of committing perjury regarding his relationship with a former White House intern. Despite endless and constant media coverage of the scandal and being impeached by the House of Representatives, then acquitted by the Senate, Clinton survived the scandal with record approval ratings.

In addition to creating the biggest media feeding frenzy in history thus far, media coverage of the Lewinsky scandal foreshadowed how future scandals and news in general would be covered. The instrumental role of the Internet and breakdown of the daily news cycle revolutionized the media and allowed this scandal to become so notorious in modern history.

Synopsis

The illicit affair between President Clinton and White House intern Monica Lewinsky occurred about two years before the scandal became public. Lewinsky began her internship in the Office of the Chief of Staff in early July 1995. Just a couple days before the affair began, Lewinsky accepted a paying job in the Office of Legislative Affairs that she would start two weeks later. On November 14, 1995 the federal government shut down as a result of the inability of Congress to pass a budget. As an intern, Lewinsky was still required to go to work. On November 15, Clinton visited the chief of staff's office for a birthday party where he met Lewinsky. That night marked the first of many sexual encounters between the president and the intern.

Clinton and Lewinsky continued their affair until February 19, at which time Clinton terminated the relationship. Just over a month later, however, Clinton called Lewinsky, inviting her to see a movie in the White House theater. On March 31, Lewinsky visited Clinton in the Oval Office where they had another sexual encounter. On April 5, due to her superiors' worries, Lewinsky was removed from her job at the White House and transferred to a position at the Pentagon. In February of 1997, Clinton and Lewinsky had a sexual encounter in the study next to the Oval Office, the first in 11 months. On March 29, 1997 they had their last rendezvous; Clinton later ended the relationship on May 24 (Starr 1998).

Meanwhile, Lewinsky had befriended her coworker at the Pentagon, Linda Tripp, and confided in her about the affair with Clinton. Tripp had also worked at the White House and in the spring of 1996, after leaving her job there, she had the idea to write a book with an inside look at the Clinton presidency. In late September 1997, Tripp began recording her conversations with Lewinsky regarding the affair. Urged by her literary agent, Lucianne Goldberg, Tripp brought the tapes to the attention of Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr and several reporters, including Michael Isikoff of *Newsweek*.

At the time, Starr was working on the Paula Jones sexual harassment case. Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, alleged that then-governor Clinton sexually harassed her in a Little Rock hotel room in 1991. Jones did not accuse Clinton of harassment until February 1994, well outside the 180-day window federal law requires to file a formal sexual harassment complaint. She could, however, still file a civil suit against Clinton under Arkansas law. Clinton's defense team argued that a civil suit could not be brought against a sitting president. The case went through the court system, eventually reaching the U.S. Supreme Court in early

1997. On May 28, 1997, the Court unanimously ruled that the civil suit could proceed, rejecting Clinton's claims of presidential immunity.

In December 1997, Lewinsky was served with a subpoena to testify in the Paula Jones case that also demanded she relinquish any gifts Clinton had given her. On January 7, 1998 Lewinsky signed an affidavit in the Jones case asserting that she had not had sexual relations with Clinton. FBI agents then equipped Tripp with a hidden microphone so she could further record conversations with Lewinsky. During one of these conversations, Lewinsky encouraged Tripp to commit perjury by not disclosing the affair while under oath. Lewinsky indicated that she believed Clinton would deny the relationship as well (Isikoff 1999).

On January 16, Tripp lured Lewinsky into a meeting where the FBI intercepted Lewinsky, explaining that she was the subject of a criminal investigation. FBI agents and U.S. attorneys then questioned Lewinsky and offered her immunity from charges of perjury, witness tampering, and obstruction of justice, although she did not accept the immunity at that time (Isikoff 1999). The next day, Clinton denied having sexual relations with Lewinsky in a deposition in the Jones case. In July 1998, Lewinsky was granted immunity in exchange for her grand jury testimony regarding her relationship with Clinton. On August 17, 1998, Clinton admitted to having an inappropriate relationship with Lewinsky in taped grand jury testimony. On September 9, Starr delivered his report to Congress, citing 11 possible impeachable offenses committed by Clinton (Starr 1998).

On December 11, the House Judiciary Committee, along a straight party-line vote, approved an article of impeachment, citing Clinton's perjury before the Starr grand jury. Three more articles of impeachment were later passed, alleging perjury in the Jones Case and abuse of presidential power. On December 19, the House of Representatives voted to impeach Clinton,

approving two of the articles of impeachment. This marked only the second time in U.S. history that a president had been impeached, the first being Andrew Johnson in 1868. Clinton then faced a 21-day trial in the Senate where he was ultimately acquitted of all charges (Isikoff 1999).

Technology

Unlike in the case studies previously examined, technology played a major role in the breaking and media coverage of the Lewinsky scandal. By the time Clinton entered office, technology had dramatically advanced and thus fundamentally altered communications. The Clinton Administration embraced new technologies by creating the first-ever White House website (Maltese 2000). Although the Clintonites wanted to utilize new technology, the Internet, ironically, spurred the greatest scandal of Clinton's career.

In the late 1990s, the Internet was still a new media frontier, offering users countless ways to access information. The Internet provides an easy way for anyone to create a website and disseminate information. With little regulation or editorial control, individuals can publish material regardless of its veracity. Furthermore, the Internet increased the speed at which information is published. The initial leaking of the Lewinsky affair is a prime example of the power of the Internet. Michael Isikoff, a reporter at *Newsweek*, had been working on the story for months but editors at *Newsweek* were hesitant to publish because they wanted further evidence of the unsubstantiated claims. Matt Drudge, creator and editor of the online *Drudge Report*, became aware of the story and published it online. For the first time ever, traditional media had to react to and compete with the new media. Not until after Drudge broke the scandal did the elite media, such as the *Washington Post*, pursue the story (Busby 2001).

In fact, Drudge had been causing problems for the mainstream media as soon as the *Drudge Report* was launched in 1997. Drudge offered “exclusive” Washington gossip that was false more often than not. Still, he was entertaining and correct just enough to garner the attention of the elites. Drudge was able to pick up stories from other news organizations and publish his own version online before the mainstream media could go to print. He broke the Lewinsky scandal at 2:32 AM on a Sunday, claiming that Isikoff had developed the story of his career, only to have it squashed by *Newsweek* publishers. Although Drudge did not mention Lewinsky’s name or Starr’s involvement, Isikoff was rightfully worried that the mainstream media would pick up the story. Essentially, Drudge had forced the hand of media elites (Isikoff 1999).

Throughout the lengthy scandal, the Internet remained a significant factor in media coverage. Websites became important tools for the mainstream media as they faced fierce competition with alternative sources. When the mainstream media pursued the scandal in the wake of Drudge’s online publication, they also published the stories online. Prior to this scandal, most mainstream media outlets adhered to an unwritten rule that they would not use their websites to break news. In order to remain competitive, however, the mainstream media had to adapt to new rules (Maltese 2000).

Relationship With The Media

By the time the Lewinsky scandal broke, Clinton had already weathered prior sex scandals. In fact, this scandal only surfaced as a result of the Paula Jones sexual harassment case. Throughout Clinton’s presidency, scandal after scandal plagued the White House. The

affair with Lewinsky was simply part of the Clinton narrative and the media pounced at the opportunity to exploit misconduct that occurred during Clinton's time in office.

Clinton had a long history of the media questioning his morality and character. In his 1992 presidential campaign, Clinton faced character issues and encountered endless questions about an improper relationship with Gennifer Flowers. During the first few months of his presidency, Clinton and his wife, Hillary, dealt with the Whitewater controversy, an investigation into their real estate investments in a failed business endeavor. In 1994 Paula Jones, a former Arkansas state employee, filed sexual harassment charges against Clinton, the governor at the time of the alleged offense (Glad 1998). With relentless media coverage of scandal after scandal and a humiliating defeat for Democrats in the 1994 midterm elections, Clinton was treading water.

When Clinton assumed office, he and his team fully expected to master the new media and traditional media. Instead, however, the Administration had a sour relationship with the press corps. Clinton's team was relatively young and entered office inexperienced and slightly arrogant. During his first couple of months in office, Clinton did not hold conventional full-scale press conferences for the White House Press Corps. Instead, he held sessions with representatives from local media. George Stephanopoulos, the White House Communications Director, closed off access to the area in the West Wing where he and the press secretary had their offices. Now, reporters had to wait to be spoon-fed information. By the spring of 1993, the relationship had improved slightly but the White House suffered from the lack of a consistent media message. Furthermore, Clinton, sometimes allowing the media to antagonize him, treated journalists with contempt, clearly unable to control his temper. By the time Clinton began his second term, he and his administration were much more focused and disciplined but the media,

especially the White House Press Corps, resented the ways in which they were managed. Throughout the numerous scandals in the Clinton White House, the press corps remained suspicious of the veracity of Clinton's denials. When the Lewinsky scandal broke, the media had long-repressed hostility that erupted. Clinton had mastered the "non-denial denial," the evasive answer that circled the truth. Unconvinced of his innocence, journalists were not inclined to defend Clinton (Maltese 2000).

As a result of years of determined spinning and elusive answers, the White House paid a severe price for angering the media. The Clinton Administration still spun the story, suggesting that Tripp's tapes may have been doctored and characterizing Lewinsky as flirtatious, obsessed with Clinton, and perhaps mentally unstable. Then they adopted a new strategy: silence. This strategy, however, did not silence the media. Accustomed to aggressive spin, the media assumed Clinton was silent because he did not have anything credible to say (Kurtz 1998).

Ultimately, the media's relentless hammering of Clinton backfired in terms of the media's reputation. Coverage of the scandal did not matter to public opinion as much as the media would have thought (Lawrence and Bennett 2001). While the media focused on Clinton's flaws, he continuously emphasized his leadership and the effectiveness of his policies. In fact, the media may have enabled Clinton's survival by touting his accomplishments and showing film of him acting presidential (Cohen 2004). Throughout the scandal Clinton enjoyed record-high approval ratings, likely a result of the booming economy (Kurtz 1998). Furthermore, it seemed that stories about the scandal only drove Clinton's approval ratings higher (Maltese 2000). Despite the media's best efforts, they could not derail this president when Americans were generally happy with his handling of the economy.

Use Of Anonymous Sources

With a scandal that received so much media attention, it is unsurprising that many in the media relied on anonymous sources for information. Because the affair between Clinton and Lewinsky was under investigation during the Paula Jones lawsuit, it would likely be easier for journalists to convince knowledgeable individuals to talk if they could guarantee anonymity. In the media coverage of the scandal, reports were frequently published without naming sources. When a source was mentioned, the attribution was often vague and therefore useless. Furthermore, some of the more unbelievable stories were based on sheer gossip. As usual, when newspapers printed retractions, those retractions received less attention than the original falsehoods (Glad 1998).

Although the frequent use of anonymous sources is lamentable, it likely results from intense competition among media outlets and the rapid turnover of news stories. With a media environment that demanded updates on the scandal every half hour, journalists and their superiors felt pressure to supply information. As a result of the feeding frenzy, some journalistic integrity was compromised.

Competition Among Media Outlets

Throughout the 1990s the media underwent serious technological changes that not only altered the media landscape, but also monumentally increased the level of competition among media outlets. In the years prior to the Lewinsky scandal, the media industry saw an expansion of cable and satellite television. While this expansion added numerous new television channels, including new cable news networks, coinciding horizontal and vertical integration of the media led to fewer owners and operators (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000). The growth of media

outlets and the ability for consumers to access 24-hour news transformed the media's profit motives and incentives and inspired greater competition among those outlets.

As a result of the expansion of and increased competition among media outlets, the mainstream media found themselves increasingly unable to act as effective gatekeepers (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000). The Lewinsky scandal and the pressure to remain relevant forced the mainstream media to report matters that were generally left for the tabloids. Although the mainstream media of the past would have declined to cover sex scandals, instead leaving those stories for *Entertainment Tonight* or the *National Enquirer*, elite media outlets were forced to stoop to the level of tabloids due to the fierce media competition. Any news organization that did not trump up the importance of this scandal risked losing viewers, and therefore advertisers, to competing outlets (Busby 2001).

The competition existed not just between cable networks or print media, but also between local and national news. For the first time in media history, broadcast news also had to compete with Internet sources, such as the *Drudge Report*. Alternative media outlets played an increasingly significant role in the scandal, garnering the attention of the mainstream media. In fact, the mainstream media developed a pattern of ignoring issues raised by alternative media, only to then be pressured to react to those issues (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000). The media faced serious self-regulation problems as a result. The pressure to publish information first created much concern about the veracity of unsubstantiated news reports among critics and observers of the media (Busby 2001). In private, journalists complained about the unremitting pressure to match each new allegation made by another media outlet or to reprint the claim, yet they were powerless to halt the velocity of the scandal (Kurtz 1998). Ultimately, the competition created an echo effect by which news organizations repeated stories without independently

corroborating the information (Maltese 2000). Although many journalists questioned the relevance of Clinton's sex life, the media were obsessed with the scandal and had adapted to the highly competitive environment (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000).

Availability Of 24-Hour News

Unlike Nixon or Reagan, throughout media coverage of his scandal, Clinton had to endure the scrutiny that 24-hour news encouraged. Although Reagan dealt with CNN, founded in 1980, the news industry was once again revolutionized in 1996 with the founding of Fox News and MSNBC. These two networks relied heavily on talk shows to constitute the majority of their time slots (Maltese 2000). As a result of the expansion of cable news, media consumers in 1998 could literally spend an entire day absorbing information about the Lewinsky scandal (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000). MSNBC went so far as to create "The White House in Crisis," a nightly show solely devoted to discussion of the scandal. The news networks had truly become "All-Monica, All-the-time" (Maltese 2000).

The newly available 24-hour news also eliminated a staple of the industry: the daily news cycle. For decades the daily news cycle dictated when and how the news would be reported. With news now available at all times of the day and night, the daily news cycle collapsed. Stories regarding the Lewinsky scandal, therefore, were updated every 20 minutes (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000). The media had become truly obsessed with the scandal. Journalists, facing pressure from their networks and publishers, struggled to contend with the endless waves of accusations. The scandal filled the airwaves with networks devoting more airtime to Lewinsky in just one week than had been allotted to all previous Clinton scandals combined (Kurtz 1998). Significant news items were put aside to focus all attention on the scandal. The scandal even

interrupted mainstream media coverage of a historic papal visit to Cuba (Busby 2001). The availability of 24-hour news provided the media with the opportunity to propagate presidential scandals.

Summary

In summary, I found that the role of technology, namely the Internet, was perhaps the most consequential factor in this scandal. Because *Newsweek's* Michael Isikoff was sitting on the story, waiting for editorial approval, it is a distinct possibility that the public may not have become aware of the affair between Clinton and Lewinsky until much later if the *Drudge Report* had not broken the scandal online. Technology further propelled the endless stories about the affair with major mainstream media outlets posting online news articles, irrespective of the daily news cycle.

Additionally, I found that the hostile relationship between the Clinton Administration and the media encouraged the feeding frenzy around the scandal. The saturation of coverage, however, may have helped Clinton escape permanent damage in the eyes of the public. Tired of the media bashing presidents, the public overall regarded the scandal as entertainment.

Furthermore, I found that the usage of anonymous sources in media coverage of the Lewinsky scandal was at a high level. The intense competition and quickly developing story encouraged many to rely on anonymous sources and abandon some journalistic integrity and reliability.

Moreover, I found that the high level of competition among media outlets led to the breakdown of gatekeeping and encouraged the mainstream media to cover matters normally left for the tabloids. Media outlets could not afford to ignore new allegations for fear of losing

consumers and profits. Overall, this competition further blurred the line between news and entertainment.

Finally I found the availability of 24-hour news on multiple mediums caused endless coverage of the scandal and over-exposure. With multiple 24-hour news channels and the Internet, the public was inundated with scandal stories. This new news cycle, or lack thereof, caused a backlash against the media and likely also allowed Clinton to survive the scandal in the eyes of the public.

Consequences

Despite their best efforts, the media's credibility suffered as a result of this scandal's coverage. Overzealous journalists, a 24-hour news cycle, the Internet, and an Oval Office affair created the biggest media feeding frenzy this country had ever seen. The need to remain relevant and fresh caused many media outlets to abandon or at least revise the journalistic standards that had dictated the news for decades. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to discern between newsworthy stories and entertainment. Furthermore, the distinction between fact and opinion has blurred with the proliferation of pundits on cable news (Williams and Delli Carpini, 2000).

The media's quest to expose Clinton's sex life made the public question the propriety of it all. The public, as the media did previously, distinguishes between private and public character, between the personal and the presidential. The media's behavior aroused misgivings as though they had intruded on a private world, unfit for public awareness (Jamieson and Aday 1998). Many blamed the media as the prime reason for the numerous prominent political scandals in modern times. Ironically, as the media scrutinized Clinton's private life and

character, media observers and critics scrutinized the media's reputation. The media wanted to showcase Clinton's flaws but instead revealed their own faults and shortcomings. Ultimately, the media were unable to translate commentary on and criticism of Clinton into a significant change in public opinion (Busby 2001).

Kenneth Starr also failed to focus attention on the legal issues of the scandal. Instead of fostering a debate about the obstruction of justice and perjury committed by Clinton, the scandal centered on Clinton's improper sexual relationship. Furthermore, the content and publication of the *Starr Report* undermined Starr's attempts to make a persuasive case for impeachment (Busby 2001). The controversial report offered 11 possible grounds for impeachment, all related to Clinton's affair with Lewinsky. Originally, the focus of Starr's investigation was the Whitewater real estate ventures, yet he requested permission to expand the investigation to include the allegations that Clinton had lied in his grand jury testimony in the Paula Jones case (Gormley 1999). Although Starr succeeded in convincing the House of Representatives that there were ample grounds for impeachment, he could not persuade the public.

Just as the Watergate and Iran-Contra hearings were televised, so too were the Clinton impeachment hearings. This time, in addition to network news, cable news also covered the hearings. Still, viewership of the Clinton impeachment hearings never reached the levels attained by the Watergate or Iran-Contra hearings (Busby 2001). In fact, the public reacted negatively to the impeachment proceedings. Voters further showed their dissatisfaction with Clinton's opponents in Congress in the 1998 midterm elections (Williams and Delli Carpini 2000).

Although the House of Representatives impeached Clinton, the Senate acquitted him of all charges, allowing him to finish his second term in office. The public moved on quickly after

the trial, never paying as much attention to the spectacle as the media would have liked. This is most likely due to the robust economy of the late 1990s. Still, Clinton just barely survived the scandal. If the American public had been dissatisfied with Clinton's handling of domestic policy, it is likely that he would have had an even tougher time surviving the scandal. Ultimately, the entertainment value of a presidential extramarital affair outweighed any political significance the scandal might have had (Lawrence and Bennett 2001).

Unlike Iran-Contra and especially Watergate, the public was not clamoring for answers during this scandal. The media pursued the scandal without contemplating the level of interest of the public. During the Watergate saga, the media led the investigation of Nixon's web of lies and essentially brought down a president. The Iran-Contra Affair, however, presented unique challenges to a media poorly equipped to handle foreign affairs. By the time the Lewinsky scandal broke, the media were hungry for a repeat of Watergate and thought they could achieve the same prestige as the media of that earlier era. Instead, scandal coverage saturated every medium, drowning out any potential political significance Clinton's charges of perjury and obstruction of justice might have had. Aided with unprecedented technology, the media overplayed their hand and lost their sense of purpose, hopelessly harping on a sex scandal.

Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter I will summarize my findings, organized by independent variable. Furthermore, I will offer conclusions and suggestions for future study, as well as improvements for this thesis.

Technology

In the pre-Watergate era, the modern technology available today was non-existent. Television constituted the “new media” of the time. The emergence of television transformed the media industry but did not yet encourage greater scrutiny of public officials. Broadcast news remained focused on current events and hard news. While politicians’ physical appearances were now more relevant to the public, their private lives remained unaffected.

During the Watergate scandal, the Internet and other forms of modern technology were non-existent. The lack of modern technology produced obstacles for the media when investigating. Although these obstacles were commonplace and the media were equipped to deal with them, they nonetheless slowed the discovery and investigation processes. In essence, the lengthy time frame of this scandal might have been condensed if modern technology, such as the Internet, had existed.

Although computers had been invented at the time of the Iran-Contra Affair, they were not utilized in media coverage. Without the Internet, computers were little more than word processors and storage devices. The media had a particularly difficult time covering this scandal, in part due to a lack of modern technology. Unlike domestic affairs, the media heavily relied on the official government sources when covering foreign affairs. With members of the Reagan

Administration lying and the inability to corroborate information with foreign reports, the media were not prepared to comprehensively investigate and cover the scandal.

By the time the Lewinsky scandal occurred, the Internet had been invented and had revolutionized the media. This marked the first time an Internet media outlet broke news of a presidential scandal, foreshadowing the future of media production. Without Matt Drudge and his online quasi-news site, it is unclear when the public would have become aware of Clinton's affair with a former White House intern. The existence of modern technology played a crucial role in the development and coverage of this scandal, affecting both competition among media outlets and the velocity of the scandal among the media.

Relationship With The Media

During the pre-Watergate era, the media trusted the government officials they covered and respected their privacy. They avoided taboo topics that infringed upon the private lives of politicians. Furthermore, they believed that a politician's private life did not necessarily affect the ability to govern. The comfortable, lapdog relationship quickly deteriorated, however, in the 1960s. Distrust settled in, permanently tainting the relationship between the media and their subjects. Despite the contentious relationship in the years prior to Watergate, the media focused its aggression on matters of the public realm, not the private lives of politicians.

Unlike Nixon's immediate predecessors, the media personally disliked him. Nixon shared those sentiments and did not hesitate to show his distaste for the media. He and his aides sought to mislead and manipulate the media, damaging an already fragile relationship. When it became clear that Nixon was involved in an elaborate cover-up of the Watergate break-in, the

media did not hesitate to pursue him. Nixon's personal toxic relationship with the media probably affected coverage of Watergate and encouraged greater scrutiny of his character.

Although Reagan was not beloved by the media like Kennedy, he was not loathed like Nixon, and thus benefitted from a lukewarm relationship with the media. Furthermore, despite the media's efforts, negative associations would not stick to Reagan. Well aware that they appeared to be antagonizing the president, the media exercised some moderation in their personal criticisms. Although the media pointed out Reagan's distortion of the facts, his popularity among the public made negative coverage futile. Despite his connection to the scandal, the media never questioned Reagan's character or objectives as they had Nixon's.

When the Lewinsky scandal broke, the media had already grown tired of Clinton's scandals and evasive answers. The Clinton Administration's attempts to manage the media, along with the endless allegations of Clinton's misconduct, partly led the media to erupt in a firestorm when the Lewinsky scandal became public. The feeding frenzy that ensued was voracious and vicious. The media seemed to be following a new set of rules according to which every aspect of president's life was legitimate news.

Use Of Anonymous Sources

In the pre-Watergate era, journalists used anonymous sources as sparingly as possible, or at a low level. The lack of sources or attributions threatened the credibility of media outlets, causing many editors to hesitate before publishing stories that relied on anonymous sources. In certain cases, such as crime reports, journalists had no choice but to use anonymous sources. Regardless, the public perceived the media as very trustworthy and the media wished to encourage this reputation by remaining credible.

The Watergate scandal inspired greater use of anonymous sources. During this scandal, the use of anonymous sources was at a medium level and produced the legendary Deep Throat of Woodward and Bernstein fame. Guaranteed anonymity for potential sources was essential to media coverage of this scandal. The media had to be able to provide protection for sources because the scandal involved the upper echelons of the executive branch of the federal government, including the president himself.

The use of anonymous sources during coverage of the Iran-Contra Affair was at a medium level. By this time, relying on anonymous sources had become commonplace. Although I could find no specific references to anonymous sources in my research, it is reasonable to assume that they were used given the journalistic standards of the time, as well as the classified nature of the events of the scandal.

During the Lewinsky scandal, the use of anonymous sources was at a high level. Journalists relied heavily on anonymous sources when covering this scandal due to the intense profit pressures and competition among media outlets. Furthermore, updates to the scandal occurred every half hour. This caused a supply and demand crisis in which an outlet had to supply new information to meet the demands of other outlets.

Competition Among Media Outlets

In pre-Watergate times, the competition among media outlets was low. Without new media and only three major television channels, there was little competition. The competition that did exist was between print and broadcast media. The emergence of television challenged the power and influence of national newspapers and caused circulation rates to decline. Still, in

terms of the national market, competition remained low because there were relatively few national outlets.

The level of competition among media outlets during the Watergate scandal was low as well. For the better part of a year, only the *Washington Post* was zealously pursuing the story. Once the televised Senate hearings began, the competition increased as more outlets paid attention to the developments of the scandal. However, without cable news or the Internet, the overall level of competition remained low.

At the time of the Iran-Contra Affair, the competition among media outlets was at a medium level. The expansion of media outlets, including the creation of the first news-only network, prompted increased coverage of the scandal. Like the Watergate hearings, the Iran-Contra hearings were also televised, however, CNN now offered continuous live coverage. Although competition had increased, the media still struggled to cover this scandal.

During the Lewinsky scandal, the competition among media outlets was high. Significant technological advancements increased the level of competition monumentally. For the first time, broadcast and print media had to compete with new media. The Internet provided immediate news with which traditional media struggled to compete. Moreover, the expansion of cable television offered viewers greater choice, thus increasing the competition among media outlets further.

Availability Of 24-Hour News

In the pre-Watergate era, 24-hour news was unavailable. Media outlets that could provide constant and immediate news did not yet exist. Instead, news publication adhered to the

daily news cycle. Daily newspapers and nightly news provided the majority of Americans with the news. Furthermore, there were few radio stations that offered 24-hour news.

Similarly, 24-hour news was unavailable during the Watergate scandal. Developments in the scandal were printed each day or broadcast each night. The unavailability of 24-hour news slowed the media's distribution of scandal coverage because they still followed the daily news cycle.

The Iran-Contra Affair marks the first presidential scandal during which 24-hour news was available. Founded in 1980, CNN was the first cable news network to debut. Although 24-hour news was available, it did not remarkably affect media coverage of the affair. The daily news cycle remained the dominant media schedule of news distribution.

During the Lewinsky scandal, 24-hour news was not only available, but had expanded to include more media outlets. In addition to CNN, MSNBC and Fox News now offered 24-hour news coverage. With so much time to fill, these news networks were able to devote entire shows to covering this scandal. The proliferation of 24-hour news outlets encouraged the media's obsession with the Lewinsky scandal.

Conclusions

Prior to analyzing these presidential scandals, it was evident that the scrutiny of the personal lives and personalities of political officeholders has increased in the decades since World War II. After analyzing these case studies, the causes of this increased scrutiny is clearer, though not definite. The independent variables I employed (technology, relationship with the media, use of anonymous sources, competition among media outlets, and availability of 24-hour

news) certainly affect the level of scrutiny a president or other officeholder faces, but I cannot definitively conclude that these variables cause increased scrutiny.

Advancements in technology, namely the advent of the Internet and subsequently social media, have made it easier for the media to investigate scandals. The newsgathering system was incredibly slow prior to the existence of modern technology, as was news production. Modern technology provides the media with the necessary tools to be an efficient watchdog. The media have easy access to various records and information that allows them to further scrutinize politicians. Before the Internet, journalists, if interested, had to conduct this type of research in libraries or government offices. Today, a great deal of information can be found online. Furthermore, once a scandal enters the public realm today, it is exceedingly simple to propagate the scandal further. Anyone, including the media, can share a news article or video by email, tweet, Facebook post, or YouTube. Modern technology has essentially increased the efficiency of media watchdogs.

Upon analyzing these presidential scandals as well as the pre-Watergate era, it seems that a president's relationship with the media is a significant indicator as to how intensely he will be scrutinized by the media. In the pre-Watergate era, the media trusted and often liked the presidents they covered. This type of relationship benefitted presidents immensely, as the media respected their privacy. Although the media were aware of the skeletons in the closet, they did not wish to expose them and found them irrelevant to public life. During Watergate and afterwards, the relationships between presidents and the media are various shades of negative. The Vietnam War and the events of Watergate irreparably damaged the relationship and caused the media to increase its scrutiny of presidents. Nixon's personal relationship with the media was hostile from the beginning of his career and thus the media did not hesitate to destroy him

politically. Reagan appears to be an outlier in these case studies. Although his relationship with the media was not good by any means, Reagan was able to effectively manage the media. While the credibility and morality of his administration was questioned, Reagan avoided personal scrutiny and was deemed to be exceedingly ignorant at worst. Clinton's relationship with the media was also contentious and the media did not trust him or his administration. Scandals plagued him throughout his first term in office and by the time the Lewinsky scandal broke, the media had grown tired of Clinton's denials. A great feeding frenzy then ensued, further tainting their relationship. Comparison of these scandals conveys the importance of a president's relatively positive relationship with the media as it can dictate how closely the media scrutinizes him.

In my analysis I found that the media's use of anonymous sources does not necessarily cause increased scrutiny of presidents but seems to be more of a by-product of the media environment. Since Watergate, the use of anonymous sources has increased. Although this correlates with the increased scrutiny of presidents, the media's reliance on anonymous sources is likely the result of increased competition among media outlets and the pressure that journalists and their editors feel to supply news. While anonymous sources can help the media, as in the case of Watergate, too much reliance on these sources can threaten the credibility of the media, as in the case of the Lewinsky scandal.

Throughout my research, the level of competition among the media directly correlated with the intensity of scrutiny that presidents faced. As the media expanded and fragmented, competition among outlets increased. Outlets faced intense pressure to meet the demands of advertisers and consumers. The mainstream media thus increased its coverage of scandals and entertainment news to attract viewers and advertisers. In the pre-Watergate era and during the

Watergate scandal, the level of competition among media outlets was low, with only three major television channels and newspapers providing most of the news to Americans. When the Iran-Contra Affair occurred, the media had expanded and the first 24-hour news channel had been founded. Still, the level of competition at this time was medium. By the time the Lewinsky scandal broke, traditional media had to compete with various alternative media, including those on the Internet. This created a high level of competition among media outlets and resulted in endless coverage of the scandal. As the level of competition among media outlets increases, those outlets have greater monetary incentives to increase their coverage of scandals, ultimately increasing the scrutiny of presidents and other officeholders.

Similarly, the availability of 24-hour news has coincided with increased scrutiny of politicians. The rise of pundits is a major consequence of 24-hour news. Cable news networks such as CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News fill much of their airtime with news talk shows featuring political pundits. These pundits offer their analyses of events instead of simply reporting the facts. This has caused the media to increase its scrutiny of the private lives of politicians because, essentially, pundits are paid to do so. Furthermore, these networks have a great deal of airtime to fill and scandal coverage is an effective way to attract viewers. The Iran-Contra Affair marks the first scandal during which 24-hour news was available, however, its effects were not truly felt until the Lewinsky scandal. Constant coverage of the scandal encouraged greater scrutiny of Clinton's character and private life than a president had ever endured.

Limitations And Future Research

There are several limitations for the application of these conclusions to the understanding of presidential scandals and media scrutiny of public officials in general. First, in a case study

analysis, the researcher is the primary data collector. This could result in me, the researcher, allowing my biases to influence my selection of case studies. Furthermore, I relied on descriptive analysis, limiting my ability to make causal inferences. Finally, this study was very limited in its scope. By analyzing only three case studies, the conclusions of this study lack external validity.

Further research could expand on this study by increasing the number of case studies analyzed. Additionally, the control in this study could be changed to permit the examination of scandals that occur at other levels of government, not only at the presidential level. Finally, if time and resources allow, quantitative research could be conducted that use these variables. This would allow conclusions to be applied more generally.

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