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WEATHERING THE STORM: A COMPARISON OF SCANDAL RECOVERY
WATERGATE, IRAN-CONTRA, AND THE LEWINSKY AFFAIR

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ABSTRACT

My thesis examines the means by which presidents recover from, or are destroyed by, major scandals and attempts to establish a framework that determines the most important factors in this regard. In addition I sought to create a model of scandal recovery that can be applied to future situations. I did this by comparing the recovery periods of Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Lewinsky Affair. I evaluated all three situations across five common criteria, divided into two sections. The first section deals with internal factors that affect scandal recovery: White House strategy and the president himself. The second three sections are the external factors outside of the control of the administration: the investigations, the media, and the general context of the times. While it is impossible in any of these scandals to determine a single factor that explains why a president did or did not recover, one common pattern is evident. In order to recover the president must first personally win over the public and present a cohesive and convincing strategy that declares his innocence. Next, the external factors of the investigations and the media can either help or harm the president's hopes of survival. In order to harm him they must both declare his guilt or present a negative view of him, and the public must support this opinion. Finally, some consideration must be given to the larger context that existed at the time of each scandal. Times of peace and prosperity create an environment conducive to scandal recovery, whereas periods of turmoil hinder it. Judging by these criteria it is clear to see why Nixon's recovery in Watergate failed completely and why Reagan and Clinton survived their respective scandals.

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Introduction

Major presidential scandals represent a strange phenomenon in American history and culture. The public watches as the most powerful person in the country comes under fierce scrutiny for alleged illegal activities. People get to judge beyond policy decisions and take a deeper look at the president as a person. In addition, political opponents have one more opportunity to prove that the people elected the wrong person. More interestingly, however, after the scandal has broken, it quickly takes on a life of its own and usually consumes the attention of the nation for at least a short amount of time. Despite a generally gloom outlook for the president in the event of a major scandal, he is not necessarily doomed. The most well known modern presidential scandals, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Clinton/Lewinsky affair, show us that scandal aftermath can take extremely divergent paths. I chose to examine these three scandals in particular because they all involved potentially illegal activities perpetrated by the president, brought up the issue of impeachment, dominated the news for at least a short period of time, and launched a series of investigations.

After Watergate, Richard Nixon was vilified by the country, faced sure impeachment, and resigned in order to avoid it. He is largely remembered as a failure and one of the worst leaders in recent memory. Ronald Reagan faced similar questions about his knowledge and/or approval of illegal activities in Iran-Contra, but he recovered spectacularly, encountering few attempts to impeach him. The public recalls him as a grandfatherly figure who connected with people on an extraordinary deep and sincere level. Finally, Bill Clinton became the second president in history to face an impeachment trial after an investigation helped reveal his sexual affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. Although Congress nearly removed him from office, Clinton held onto public support, and he remains popular in the collective judgment of

Americans.

Recovery from scandal is a multifaceted process affected by a wide spectrum of factors. Note that from herein “recovery” will refer to the ability of the president to maintain relative popularity, hold onto office, and leave a positively perceived legacy. First, one must consider the internal components, or aspects that are under the control of the administration or the president. These are the figurative front lines sent out to the public in a concerted attempt to mitigate the scandal and absolve the president of guilt. They generally change to adapt to the scandal as it evolves and as new questions emerge that need answers. The first of these two factors is White House strategy, or the specifically formulated plan that the administration launches in response to scandal exposure. Next is the president himself and how he reacts. As the obvious front person, he has the chance to win over the public in his speeches and addresses, or he can turn it further against him.

On the other hand, one must also consider what happens externally after a scandal breaks. The country kicks into overdrive and the president and the administration largely go on the defensive, fielding both attacks and support. The first of these external factors is the investigative bodies. As soon as the possibility of illegal activity surfaces both the executive and legislative branches of government launch investigations to determine if any took place and if so, the extent of the president’s involvement. Moreover, this is where talk of impeachment emerges which can potentially end the presidency by force. Another external force in scandal recovery is the national media. As the intermediary between the administration and the public, the media can interject its own opinion in its reports and influence people’s reactions to the scandal. Finally, scandals, of course, do not occur in a vacuum so consideration must be given to the external context at the time. Aspects such as the economy and foreign affairs can impact how the public

feels about the president and the scandal, and more importantly how willing it is to forgive indiscretions.

Because scandals and their recovery periods are so many-sided, it is impossible to determine a single factor that results in the recovery or demise of the president. Likewise, when one looks only at Watergate and Iran-Contra it is easy to say that the combination of all factors either in favor of or to detriment of the president determine survival, or the likelihood of maintaining office and keeping the support of the public. The Lewinsky scandal helps to solve this puzzle. Clinton faced an extremely adverse Congress and media, yet he still came out on top. The reason for this is that it all comes back to public perception. Anything that the public can form an opinion of, essentially all factors except the external context, determines the likelihood of presidential recovery. With regard to internal factors, the public determines the success of the White House Strategy and judges and decides its approval of the president as a person. When it comes to the investigations and the media the public can approve or disapprove of them, just as it can the president. Thus, even if the investigations charge the president, or the media crucifies him, if the public disapproves of these actions the president can still survive. Importantly, he has to have won over the public already for this to occur. If they were unreceptive to his explanations and apologies, a poor external situation will only compound the problem. Therefore, all internal and external factors combine to determine presidential recovery, but the approval or disapproval of the public in regard to each factor is the most important aspect. Of course, not every American citizen will agree and hold the same opinions of these factors, so the term “the public” will not be used that way for the purposes of this thesis. “The public” will refer to those informed in the scandals, with at least a rudimentary knowledge of events, although this does not necessarily mean they know the truth. More importantly, when “the public” is referenced it implies a

majority of people who have made their voices known.

Finally, this thesis will not only seek to draw conclusions from Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Lewinsky scandal, but also to create an outline of scandal recovery. This framework can be applied as predictive tool in future situations to determine the likelihood of presidential recovery. The main points of this model are as follows: cohesiveness of White House strategy, believability of White House strategy, perception of the president as a person, reaction of the investigative bodies to the president, outcomes of the investigations, perception of the investigations, the media's attitude toward the president, the public's attitude toward the media, the economy, the level of foreign or domestic unrest, the partisan situation, the nature and comprehensibility of the scandal, and the cumulative effects of other scandals.

Background

Watergate

Perhaps one of the most well known events in modern American history, and definitely the biggest presidential scandal, Watergate was unprecedented in terms of scope and impact. While the word Watergate refers directly only to the site of the burglary, the scandal actually encompassed a series of events including dirty tricks, dirty money, outright crime, and an extensive cover up. A suspicious person to begin with, Richard Nixon's paranoia escalated after the New York Times began publishing the Pentagon Papers in June, 1971. Infuriated, Nixon established the "Plumbers" to stop leaks and engage in other "security" matters such as wiretapping. This covert group quickly set to work burglarizing Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist's office in order to discredit him after he released the Papers. Then, in March, the Committee to Re-Elect the President (CREEP) quickly undertook a series of dirty tricks to damage the reputations of Nixon's opponents in the November election. The event that has come to be

associated most strongly with the scandal occurred on June 17, 1972 when police arrested five men for breaking into the Democratic National Committee's headquarters at the Watergate office complex. As soon as news of the break in surfaced, the Nixon administration immediately moved into damage control and adamantly denied any connection between the crime and CREEP or the White House. The break in did not gain much attention in the media at first and no link to Nixon or any of his subordinates was established for several months. Nixon easily won reelection in November, and the White House continued to downplay the break in as a "third rate burglary attempt". In January 1973 the accused burglars went to trial, which resulted in two guilty verdicts. At this point the White House continued in its public denials, but behind the scenes it worked overtime to cover up its connection to the burglars and to hide the other illicit activities. This period of cover up became the focus of the scandal in later months.

Watergate truly began to unravel when the Senate voted to establish a committee to investigate following the Grand Jury indictment. Soon after, CREEP employee James McCord wrote an open letter to the court indicating that high-level individuals in the White House knew of and approved the break in, committed perjury, and had pressured the burglars to plead guilty. The spring of 1973 marked a turning point in the scandal as Nixon's closest aides either resigned or were fired, a special prosecutor's office was established, and White House employees began to testify to the Senate committee. Finally, the bombshell came when White House assistant Alexander Butterfield revealed the existence of a taping system, which would essentially prove or disprove Nixon's involvement in the cover up. For the next year, the administration engaged in a tug-of-war with the special prosecutor and the House Judiciary Committee over the release of the tapes and the question of whether or not Nixon was required to comply with subpoenas for them. Finally, after a majority of the public had already voiced its disapproval of him, the

Supreme Court forced Nixon to turn over the tapes on July 24, 1974. Three days later, the House Judiciary Committee passed its first of three impeachment articles. After the tapes went public there was no doubt as to Nixon's complicity in the cover up and he became the first and only president to resign. Watergate left a permanent legacy in American politics and Nixon's reputation as a poorly perceived president was cemented for generations.

In trying to recover from Watergate it seems that almost everything worked against Nixon. After denial failed completely the administration attempted several different White House strategies to help him recover. First, it sought to create a scapegoat in John Dean, but he turned on the president and made shocking statements accusing him of illegal activities. Then, the administration tried to tap into the Cold War mentality and divert attention away from the scandal. Finally, Nixon's administration saw that it was losing ground with the public so it tried a variety of strategies including using the FBI and the CIA, launching Operation Candor, and courting congressmen through impeachment politics. Unfortunately for Nixon, none of these attempts to exonerate himself from the break in worked and the rapid turnover of strategies merely made him seem guiltier. Nixon did not help matters when he tried to save himself. A cornerstone of his public response was to hold on to the principle of executive privilege, claiming that certain administration officials could not testify for reasons of confidentiality. He again tried to place the presidency above the law with the conflict over the tapes. Alongside executive privilege, Nixon invoked claims of national security to keep vital information out of the hands of Congress and the media. He tried to halt the investigations by asserting that they were interrupting sensitive foreign operations, and he maintained that he would not release the tapes because they would expose potentially dangerous security matters. Compounding the fact that neither of these excuses worked, Nixon's situation further eroded with the public's

overwhelmingly negative response to all the secrecy, and the backlash that came with the exposure of Nixon's vulgar language and tone in the tapes.

Not only did factors under Nixon's control fail to aid his recovery, almost every external factor worked against him as well. The Watergate investigative bodies – the special prosecutor, the Ervin Committee, and the House Judiciary Committee – worked judiciously to uncover the extent of illegal activities. As a result, they forced Nixon to release the White House tapes that virtually proved his guilt. Importantly, they did this with the expressed support of the public. The media also contributed to Nixon's downfall because it kept Watergate in the papers and on television, showing the public firsthand the administration's wrongdoing. Finally, the larger economic, social, and political context during Watergate did not create a situation conducive to Nixon's survival.

Iran-Contra

Twelve years later Ronald Reagan encountered a similar situation with the Iran-Contra scandal. Right before it broke, however, he was riding high as his presidency flourished. He had restored a sense of respect and trustworthiness to the office of the president after years of discontent had nearly ruined it. It seemed he could do no wrong. Then, as 1986 drew to a close, Reagan's presidency began to collapse around him. During the Iran-Contra debacle the president and his administration were accused of trading arms for hostages with Iran and illegally using the profits to support a counter-revolutionary force in Nicaragua, referred to as freedom fighters by the Reagan administration. The roots of Iran-Contra trace back to upheaval in the Middle East. After the Beirut bombing of 1982 and subsequent slaughter of Palestinian women and children by US backed Maronite Christians, Hezbollah began to identify the United States as its enemy and targeted Americans by using suicide bombers to blow up the embassy and military bases.

Finally they started taking American hostages including James Buckley, the head of the CIA station in Beirut.

This then led to the situation in 1986 where the Reagan administration found itself trading arms with Iran, who was seen as effectively the controller and key backer of Hezbollah, in exchange for hostages. At the same time, the Reagan administration undertook a mission to support the Nicaraguan Contras against the democratically elected Marxist Sandinista movement, despite the passage of the Boland amendments, which prohibited the U.S. government from funding the Contras. Then, from October 1984 until December 1985 Congress cut off all funding and banned any direct or indirect support for the Contras (Woodward 1987:508). Two events occurring in late 1986 brought these disparate elements to a head and began to expose the scandal. First, news broke on November 3, 1986 through a Lebanese paper that the United States had traded arms for hostages with Iran, despite Reagan's adamant promises that he would not cut deals with terrorists (Abshire 2005:4). After a cargo resupply plane was shot down over Nicaragua it was revealed that NSC member Oliver North had inflated the prices of the Iranian arms and used the profits to support Contra activity in Nicaragua, which was against both the Boland Amendments and the Constitution itself. In a media firestorm Reagan came under severe scrutiny as words such as impeachment and resignation began to fly. Despite all of this, just a mere year and two months later Ronald Reagan left office the most popular president since World War II beating out Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter. He lives on today in the collective American psyche as one of the most popular and beloved leaders of the 20th century.

Unlike the trend with Nixon, nearly every factor aided Reagan's ability to rebound from Iran-Contra. Aside from failed denials, his White House strategy was a success. First, to shift the

pressure off of Reagan and onto subordinates, the administration scapegoated CIA Director Casey, Chief of Staff Don Regan, National Security Advisor Vice Admiral John Poindexter, and Colonel Oliver North. Next, it stuck to claims that Reagan did not know about the illegal operations and was thus innocent, albeit not fully in control of his administration. Nixon himself was beloved by the American people and had cultivated an extremely successful public image. Even though Iran-Contra involved sensitive national security issues he did not invoke executive privilege. He also chose to accept responsibility for the actions of his subordinates, although he continued to deny any personal guilt. Finally, in spite of whatever happened to his job approval ratings, Reagan's personal approval ratings remained high.

Externally, Reagan also faced a very different situation from Nixon. The Iran-Contra investigations – the Tower Commission, the Independent Counsel, and the Congressional investigation – helped Reagan recover. The Tower Commission and Congress largely exonerated Reagan, and the one investigation that had the potential to ruin him, the Independent Counsel's, was largely unsupported by the public. Reagan also had a very favorable relationship with the press. It did not want to attack such a popular president and the public did not express a high level of interest so it could not sustain continuous reports. Finally, during Iran-Contra the nation was experiencing a time of relative stability. The economy was prospering, the forty year long Cold War was winding down, and the Watergate legacy helped insulate Reagan from devastating attacks on his presidency. Furthermore, even though partisanship prevailed the Democratic majority in Congress held back harsh attacks on the president, and people had a difficult time understanding the severity of the activities undertaken by the administration. All of this combined to create a situation where Reagan emerged from the scandal victorious and finished his presidency on a high note.

Lewinsky Scandal

The freshest scandal in the minds of many Americans, especially the younger generation, is Bill Clinton's affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky. The scandal was, and remains today, remarkable due to both its sexual nature and the fact that it resulted in the second presidential impeachment in American history. Despite this, Clinton left the White House with even higher approval ratings than when he entered office and, like Reagan, remains a popular icon in American culture and a respected leader among the American population. Unlike Watergate and Iran-Contra, the Lewinsky scandal did not involve policy decisions, traditionally criminal activity, or the actions of the government in general. Rather, the focus was on the President's inappropriate sexual relationship with a woman half his age. Exposure of the Lewinsky affair came about as a result of other investigations, namely the Paula Jones case and the Starr investigation. In 1994 Jones brought suit against Clinton alleging he had sexually harassed her during his tenure as Governor of Arkansas. The same year, Kenneth Starr took over as independent counsel and began to dig deeper into the so-called Whitewater affair, which concerned the allegedly illegal business and real estate deals of Bill and Hillary Clinton. These two events dragged on until four years later when Lewinsky's friend Linda Tripp, who knew of the relationship, brought it to the attention of Jones' lawyers.

In early 1998 Clinton gave a deposition in the Jones case flatly denying sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky. In addition, Lewinsky also denied the relationship. Tripp, armed with recorded conversations between her and Lewinsky and the knowledge of a stained blue dress, went to Ken Starr who then broadened his investigation to include the alleged affair. After months of investigating, Starr released his report to Congress, which claimed evidence that Clinton had, among other things, lied under oath and obstructed justice. As a result, the House

Judiciary Committee submitted four articles of impeachment to the full House, two of which passed – perjury and obstruction of justice. The Senate trial began in January 1999 and, as expected, resulted in an acquittal. Clinton finished the final year of his presidency unusually popular with the American public.

Whereas almost everything worked against Nixon and almost everything worked in Reagan’s favor, Clinton faced more of a mixed bag. He and his administration were very good at handling the allegations of illegal misconduct against him and mediating between the White House and the public. Unlike Watergate and Iran-Contra, the Lewinsky scandal did not involve the administration, but rather dealt with Clinton’s personal sex life. Because of this, the White House did not coordinate as much of a strategy. Even so, it did come together at times to defend the president from attacks. First, Clinton and everyone in his circle denied any improper relationship between him and Lewinsky. When she admitted to the affair, the focus shifted to denying lying under oath and obstructing justice. Besides denial, the only other coherent Clinton White House strategy to emerge from the scandal was an attempt to refocus attention away from the affair and towards national concerns. Clinton truly excelled in his public statements and addresses. He was already an exceptionally skilled rhetorician so he easily applied these talents to the scandal. First, he projected an image of himself as merely a cooperative bystander in the investigations. Then, when the truth of the affair emerged he stopped denying it and accepted responsibility for his personal misdeeds. In order to absolve himself legally he used semantics to deny that he had lied under oath. Finally, when he had to address concerns about why he originally lied about the affair Clinton invoked the excuse that it was a private matter to be dealt with within his family.

In contrast to the success he had with White House strategy and perceptions of him

personally, Clinton faced a very different situation when it came to the investigations and the media. Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's report vilified him and concluded with reasons for impeachment. The House Judiciary Committee passed four articles of impeachment and the full House approved two of them, which could have ended Clinton's presidency after a Senate trial. Although he faced potentially extremely damaging investigations, he was saved in part by the public's disapproval of them and willingness to forgive him. Similarly, Clinton's relationship with the media soured when it began to report rumors and leaked information, causing many stories to spiral out of control. Fortunately for Clinton, public backlash against the national media sent support in his direction. Finally, even with his misfortune with the investigations and the media, Clinton was lucky in regard to the context in which the Lewinsky scandal occurred. The economy was in a remarkably good state, the nation was at peace for the first time in generations, and the public's views on sex had changed so that an affair was a forgivable offense. In addition, although strident partisanship was the norm, the Republican majority eventually backed off due to public pressure, and few thought that Clinton's actions compared to the scope of illegal activity perpetrated in Watergate.

Internal Factors

A president embroiled in controversy must first master the internal factors. These are usually formulated plans created by the administration, or the offense that it will present to the public. As aspects controlled by the executive branch, these generally change as the scandal progresses to meet new challenges and adapt to various public reactions. If the president has strong and well-received internal strategy, he has a much greater chance of surviving past the scandal.

White House Strategy

The first of these internal factors is the White House strategy. As soon as a scandal breaks the administration kicks into overdrive in order to tamp down any potentially damaging information. Although it may present a calm front, formulating a successful strategy is a chaotic process that often changes either when one does not work, or in order to reinforce moderately successful approaches.

Denial

In terms of White House strategy, the single common thread between the three scandals was denial. Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton all turned to it immediately after their respective scandals broke, and then quickly abandoned it. Denial was undoubtedly a logical choice, but ultimately proved a poor one, as all three presidents suffered public backlash when their denials were nullified by emerging evidence or admissions of guilt.

In the months following the Watergate break in, concealment was of the utmost importance as the presidential election fast approached. Also because it was illegal as opposed to ill advised the White House immediately began a strategy of flat denial. White House plumber E. Howard Hunt quickly disposed of listening equipment, Plumber G. Gordon Liddy shredded the entire Gemstone file, a plan of dirty tricks aimed at political opponents, and Deputy Director of Creep Jeb Stuart Magruder removed all sensitive material from several files (Olson 2003:44). In addition, the administration took Hunt's name off of all White House phone directories and emptied his White House safe. A statement made by Attorney General John Mitchell is characteristic of this stage of the cover up when he said "we want to emphasize that this man [arrested Watergate burglar James McCord] and the other people involved were not operating either in our behalf with our consent. [...There] is no place in our campaign or in the electoral

process for this type of activity and we will not permit it or condone it.” (Olson 2003:46)

Important aspects of this strategy were Nixon’s public statements that assured the public of the absence of any connection between himself and the burglars. He even acted indignant that anyone could possibly implicate his administration. In the days immediately after the break in Nixon’s press secretary Ron Ziegler famously stated that the president would not comment on “a third rate burglary attempt.” (Olson 2003:49). This attitude continued when Nixon made his first public statement about the burglary on June 22 when he again denied White House involvement and then quickly declined to comment any further. It seems Nixon and his administration were confident that denial would lead to a loss of interest or would convince investigators that there was nothing more to examine.

Over the next two years, the administration worked around the clock trying numerous strategies to absolve Nixon of any involvement, but each was always accompanied by denial after denial. This strategy quickly fell apart when witnesses began to testify. The first major blow came when James McCord wrote a letter to Judge Sirica who read it in court on March 23, 1973. In it, McCord asserted that “1. There was political pressure applied to the defendants to plead guilty and remain silent. 2. Perjury occurred during the trial in matters highly material to the very structure, orientation and impact of the Government's case, and to the motivation and intent of the defendants. 3. Others involved in the Watergate operation were not identified during the trial, when they could have been those testifying.” (Emergence of Watergate Scandal 1974:416) Then on June 25, 1973 White House aide John Dean gave explosive testimony further implicating Nixon. These revelations made people think twice about the statements of denial and stirred up an air of suspicion around Nixon and his administration. As the scandal progressed, the denials began to fall on more and more deaf ears.

On the other hand, Reagan's denials were sweeping and absolute. In order to buy time and prevent any slip-ups no one would answer any direct questions of the scandal and Reagan refused to speak about it. At the same time great pain was taken to destroy evidence. Oliver North, the central figure of the operation in many ways, took to shredding any incriminating documents or smuggling them out of his office before Attorney General Meese could get his hands on them. He even informed National Security Advisor Bud McFarlane that there would be a "shredding party" in his NSC office (Busby, "Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair" 1999:77). Then North, McFarlane, and other aides prepared false chronologies designed to cover up any illegal actions. North completely omitted a November arms shipment to Iran and also claimed the downed American resupply plane was carrying oil-drilling equipment parts (Busby, "Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair" 1999:75). In addition, McFarlane's chronology left out a September arms shipment.

Taking control of the denials, Reagan addressed the nation on November 13, 1986. Robert Busby sums up the disastrous speech when he says, "the President initially sought to discredit alternative interpretations of events, and downplay leaked and speculative information. He endeavored to establish himself as the key authoritative source for all Iran information, a common rhetorical device used to establish source credibility, and thereafter misrepresented a number of the facts, laying himself open to accusations of falsifying a cover story." (1999:81) Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Reagan lied throughout the entire speech asserting that no arms for hostage deal existed, the U.S. had only shipped a small amount of weapons, and all actions were completely legal. The speech left much of the public with a bitter taste in its mouth and failed to dissuade any suspicions. More than ever people felt deceived especially when Reagan stated "we did not – repeat – did not trade weapons or anything else for hostages – nor

will we.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:82) Not only was the public upset, Congressional backlash was harsh as well. Members on both sides of the aisle were suspicious of the president, and even more than that resented the fact that the executive branch had excluded Congress from these deals. This raised a serious problem for the Reagan administration who temporarily lost the ability to play upon partisan politics in order to diffuse the scandal.

Reagan’s situation further deteriorated on November 19 when he held a press conference to address the allegations against his administration. Hoping that putting himself at the mercy of the press would garner support and credibility, Reagan and his aides seriously miscalculated the outcome. He again made many errors and contradicted some of the points made in his November 13 speech. The press took complete control of the situation and left Reagan to stumble through awkward questions of illegal activities. The backlash was exceptionally harsh. One Star Tribune headline stated “Reagan Defends Iran Arms Sale - Critics Left Unsoothed by Press Conference”. (Berg 1986:01A) In this article Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA) stated “I counted at least seven contradictions from what I have been told by his top aides....We have a strong foreign policy that's in serious disarray," (Berg 1986:01A) From Reagan’s own party Senator Dave Durenberger (R-MN) felt "He didn't help his policy or his credibility," and journalist Steve Berg wrote “Reagan 's attempt to defend his dealings with Iran [was] bogged down in contradictions, misinformation and continued secrecy.” (Berg 1986:01A)

Clinton’s denials were different in the sense that he changed his strategy as the scandal progressed. First he began by denying just the affair. After reports of the relationship surfaced, the president made the now infamous statement “I want to say one thing to the American people. I want you to listen to me. I’m going to say this again. I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky.” (Blaney & Benoit 2001:85) Clinton’s attackers would later use this oft

quoted line to prove that he had indeed lied about the affair. In the beginning, however, Clinton supporters took the denial at face value. In addition, “because the form of the denial was categorical, the president’s supporters could feel reassured, but it invited his adversaries to find even one exception.” (Denton & Holloway 2003:175)

In addition to Bill Clinton’s own denials, Hillary Clinton came to the vigorous defense of her husband. Whether she privately believed him or not, Hillary put on a public face and expressed disgust, shock, and outrage over the allegations. Bonded to Bill by their joint mission in politics, she immediately began to rally private and public support for her husband. Then, she went on NBC’s *Today* and made the bold statement that there was a “vast right-wing conspiracy, that has been conspiring against my husband since the day he announced for president.” (Harris 2005:312) Not only did Hillary’s statements give credibility to Bill’s denials, they also helped paint a public image of him as a family man and perhaps even a victim of a smear campaign. When Clinton made appearances, the First Lady stood stoically by his side, showing that she believed in his innocence and denials, even if it was not the case at home.

Although the public initially accepted Clinton’s denials, by the summer, the tone of them shifted out of necessity. It had become painfully clear that he did in fact have some sort of sexual relationship with Monica Lewinsky, and continuing to deny it would cause more harm than good. As evidence of the affair grew, and Lewinsky herself began to admit it, Clinton switched from denying the relationship to denying allegations of perjury and obstruction of justice. Using semantics, word play, and vague language in his denials, Clinton claimed that he had not technically made any false statements in the Jones’ deposition, although he admitted he could have been a bit more forthcoming with his answers. When it came to the accusations that he had obstructed justice and coached Lewinsky to lie, he reverted back to outright denials stating “I

never told anybody to lie. Not a single time – never. These allegations are false.” (Blaney & Benoit 2001:86) Throughout the controversy Clinton held onto this position including during impeachment proceedings. By maintaining his innocence on this front, Clinton admitted that yes he had made mistakes, but none that were in any way illegal. In addition, “when the allegations of adultery, perjury, and suborning perjury first surfaced, there was only limited evidence of the deeds: tape-recorded conversations of a former White House intern talking about her alleged affair with Clinton with a former White House employee.” (Blaney & Benoit 2001:95) This lack of evidence, combined with Clinton’s impassioned denials, helped to keep support in his favor.

In all three situations, denial was not an astute move for the president. The public remained skeptical of the claims made, and justifiably so. Of the three, Clinton’s denials harmed him the least because he had the presence of mind to alter them specifically. In addition, no one could prove his denial of legal misconduct false. Reagan’s denials marked the low point in his recovery as the public began to turn against him. However, after he began to admit wrongdoing, he altered his strategies and became more forthcoming with the public. Finally, Nixon’s denials were the most disastrous because he kept them up for the duration of the scandal. Even when the public had learned to not believe anything he said, Nixon continued the act until the erasure of some tapes and the release of other tapes made it virtually impossible. By this time the public had completely lost any trust and confidence in the president.

Scapegoating

When denial became impossible, the White House moved on to more formulated strategies to help the president move past disrepute. Nixon and Reagan’s situations involved vast webs of associates, staff, and employees, which prompted them to turn to scapegoating. They placed the blame on others to alleviate the pressure on themselves. If the public could believe

that another person was at fault, they could believe that the president was not.

When Watergate broke, White House Counsel John Dean emerged as a central figure. Capitalizing on this, Nixon attempted to make him a scapegoat who would admit responsibility for the break in. Nixon hoped Dean would write a report that “‘basically clear[ed] the President and the White House staff of involvement.’ If Dean would submit such a report, the president could go public and say, ‘look, this is what I relied on. Dean deceived me.’” (Genovese 1999:39) Without compliance from Dean, however, Nixon’s strategy could never succeed and he faced this when Dean refused to conform. As soon as he realized he was expendable Dean stated “‘some may hope or think that I will become a scapegoat in the Watergate case. Anyone who believes this does not know me, know the true facts nor understand our system of justice.’” (Olson 2003:81)

In addition to non-compliance, Dean took it a step further by providing explosive testimony to the Ervin Committee. For six hours Dean gave an opening statement to the committee that completely turned the Nixon administration on its head. He detailed the meetings he held with Nixon from September 1972 until April 1973, giving explicit details that fully implicated Nixon and his main aides. He began by claiming that on September 15, 1972 he met with Nixon and “‘left the meeting with the impression that the President was well aware of what had been going on regarding the success of keeping the White House out of the Watergate scandal,’” clearly implying Nixon’s involvement in the cover up (Dean’s Watergate Testimony 1974:662). He then went on to specifically identify Nixon’s involvement, citing his approval of using hush money to pay off the burglars. At one point Dean asserts that “[Nixon] asked me how much it would cost. I told him that I could only make an estimate that it might be as high as a million dollars or more. He told me that that was no problem, and he also looked over at

Haldeman and repeated the same statement.” (Dean’s Watergate Testimony 1974: 667) In addition to implicating Nixon in the cover up, Dean’s testimony exposed the dirty tricks common in the White House, such as attempts to discredit political opponents. For example he speaks of one conversation in which he could “recall the President telling me to keep a good list of the press people giving us trouble, because we will make life difficult for them after the election. The conversation then turned to the use of the Internal Revenue Service to attack our enemies.” (Dean’s Watergate Testimony 1974:663)

Although Dean’s testimony sent shockwaves through the press, the public, and the Ervin Committee, it was only the statement of one man who had a lot to lose. Dean knew this, even asserting "I am quite aware of the fact that in some circumstances it is going to be my word against two men, it is going to be my word against three men, and probably in some cases it is going to be my word against four men. But I am prepared to stand on my word and the truth and the knowledge and the facts I have. I know the truth is my ally in this, and I think, ultimately, the truth is going to come out." (Dean’s Watergate Testimony 1974:660) More importantly, Nixon knew this and thus formulated a strategy in which he asserted that Watergate was merely a conflict between Dean, a traitor, and the president (Mankiewicz 1975:19). This quickly failed with the shocking testimony of Alexander Butterfield who revealed the existence of the White House taping system, which would prove once and for all the truth of Dean’s words.

When it came to Iran-Contra, Reagan had a plethora of underlings to choose from in terms of people involved in the affair who he could scapegoat. The arms shipment and diversion of funds was a complex process that involved people from various government organizations. Reagan’s White House virtually went down the list placing blame on others trying to exonerate the president. CIA Director Casey was the easiest to blame because the CIA was directly

involved in the arms deal and it also had contact with the Contras. According to David Abshire “Casey’s strategy involved U.S. support in pivotal areas of the Third World, an arc running from Afghanistan to Nicaragua, to roll back the Soviet tide. He was particularly concerned that the Sandinista government of Nicaragua was becoming another communist Cuba in our hemisphere. Therefore he sought to increase aid and other support to the Contras, the ‘freedom fighters.’” (2005:50) What the public did not realize, however, was that Bill Casey suffered from a brain tumor. He fell into a coma and eventually passed away on May 6, 1987 just before giving a second testimony on the scandal. Casey’s death granted the administration a blessing in disguise. While the White House lost a high ranking official and a covert operations master, Congress lost any opportunity to question him. Casey literally took his secrets to the grave (Abshire 2005:44-55).

Next to take the fall was Chief of Staff Don Regan. Arriving at the White House in 1985, Regan took over for the popular troika of James Baker, Ed Meese, and Michael Deaver. He quickly garnered power within the White House and some, especially Nancy Reagan, disdainfully referred to him as the prime minister. Although he had minimal involvement in the events surrounding the Iran-Contra activities he soon joined the ranks of the scapegoats. Accused of sheltering Reagan too much from the actions of his own administration, Don Regan begrudgingly filled the role of villain that the press so badly wanted. One Dallas newspaper asserts “the Tower investigating commission blamed Regan for the ‘chaos that descended upon the White House’ after the disclosure of the Iran-contra affair in November.” (Leubsdorf 1987:1A) The scapegoating of Don Regan was made complete when the president “suggested” he resign. The furious, insulted, and hurt Chief of Staff issued the following concise letter: “Dear Mr. President, I hereby resign as chief of staff to the President of the United States. Respectfully

yours, Donald T. Regan.” (Abshire 2005:140) Not only did Regan’s resignation allow the administration to shift some of the blame onto him, his subsequent replacement showed that Reagan was moving on from the scandal. Robert Busby asserts “the arrival of a new Chief of Staff, untainted by scandal, heralded a fresh start, and promoted a beneficial image of the Iran-Contra affair being all in the past.” (1999:137)

As one of the most central figures in the Iran-Contra affair, it became clear early on that National Security Advisor Vice Admiral John Poindexter would be scapegoated. An Annapolis graduate and U.S. Navy veteran, Poindexter came to office in 1985 during Reagan’s second term. Taking over for Bud McFarlane, he actually escalated the arms deal and began selling weapons directly to Iran without Israel as the intermediary. When the scandal broke, Poindexter was instrumental in the initial cover up helping North and McFarlane create false chronologies for Congress. After the smoking-gun memorandum was discovered detailing the diversion of funds to the Contras it was clear Poindexter would have to go. Unlike Regan, however, Poindexter graciously left office and continued to support the president. Similar to Regan’s situation, the ousting of Poindexter allowed the administration to make claims of moving forward and to show that they were taking steps to deal with those responsible for illegal activity. Because of his central role in the scandal, Poindexter was brought to testify before Congress. The assertions he made factored in beautifully with the administration’s subsequent strategy of presidential ignorance.

Finally, in terms of scapegoats, Colonel Oliver North was capstone. As the main contact point for the Contras and the mastermind behind the diversion plan, North was clearly deeply involved in all facets of the scandal. A highly decorated Vietnam War veteran, North joined the executive branch as a National Security Council aide. After the passage of the Boland

Amendments, North worked with Casey to find a loophole that would keep the Contras alive. Because the amendment prohibited funds from any department involved in intelligence and the NSC was not technically included in this, he would work under Bud McFarlane in order to deceive Congress. North famously called it a “neat” idea (Abshire 2005:57). Like Poindexter, after the scandal broke North was instrumental in the cover up. He also created false chronologies but more importantly took to shredding important documents or smuggling them out of his office under the clothes of his secretary. Had these documents survived, there is no knowing who would be implicated in the scandal.

Because of his central involvement North was immediately brought to testify before Congress. Unfortunately, for the legislative branch, he completely turned them on their heads. Dressed in full military uniform and covered in medals, North struck a poignant picture in the eyes of many Americans. A war hero from Vietnam, he came to be seen as the victim of nasty congressional attacks. It did not help that his position was low on the floor while the committee sat high above him as if he was a prisoner on death row. Steven Spielberg described it as the “hero’s angle.” (Abshire 2005:172) Seemingly overnight, “Olliemania” spread through the United States like wildfire. He went from “Colonel North” to just plain “Ollie”, the guy you cannot help but like. Robert J. Caldwell of the San Diego Union exemplified this when he wrote “‘Lt. Col. North...is a national hero.’ -- President Reagan, Nov. 26, 1986. After four days of the most dramatic congressional hearings since Watergate, millions of Americans may now share President Reagan's celebrated description of Marine Lt. Col. Oliver L. North as a ‘national hero.’”

North was undoubtedly a folk hero, and in a flash the public moved to his side despite allegations of clearly illegal activities. He even won over members of the very committee that

had brought him to testify. Rep. Bill McCollum of Florida praised North with these kind words: “you have been a dedicated, patriotic soldier...and...you’ve gone above and beyond – on many occasions – the call of duty. For that,...I know the country is grateful.” (Walsh 1997:134) Abshire notes “North proudly admitted lying to Congress, falsifying evidence, and shredding documents – all under this noble call of patriotism – hostages returned, freedom fighters sustained.” (2005:173) Not only did North alleviate the pressure on the White House, he made Congress look like the villain. He detracted the public’s attention away from the illegality of what was done, and in the process became an overnight superstar.

Although both Reagan and Nixon had the same goal in mind in regard to scapegoating, only Reagan’s strategy ended in success. Unfortunately for Nixon, he chose to target the wrong person and instead of taking the blame, John Dean blew the lid off the scandal and made matters much worse. Contrastingly, Reagan’s targets largely complied with their roles, although sometimes reluctantly. This sent the message that he was cleaning house and expending the guilty, and it also alleviated the pressure on him. Interestingly, Oliver North did not exactly follow orders but he still aided Reagan in that he diverted attention away from him and created a villainous legislature. It should be noted that Clinton did not have the option of scapegoating because his situation involved a private affair between two lovers. He could not claim that someone else was at fault, and so he wisely chose not to.

Diverting Attention

One strategy that both Nixon and Clinton attempted was to divert attention away from the scandal and onto “more important” things. Doing so would uphold the image that the president had more important responsibilities. More importantly, both men hoped to show that despite any personal shortcomings exposed by the scandal, they would still bring victory and prosperity to

the nation.

After Nixon's situation deteriorated rapidly, he tried to capitalize on the Cold War mentality and take advantage of international circumstances. On April 30, 1973 he gave a speech and boldly stated, "whatever may now transpire in the case, whatever the actions of the grand jury, whatever the outcome of any eventual trials, I must now turn my full attention—and I shall do so—once again to the larger duties of this office. I owe it to this great office that I hold, and I owe it to you—to my country." (Watergate: White House Shake-Up 1974:505) By tying himself to the country, Nixon tried to appeal to the emotions of the era. He then proceeded to enumerate the ways in which his administration was working towards world peace including a Soviet-American summit planned for the following year, an arms reduction, peace in Southeast Asia and the Middle East, and economic progress at home (Watergate: White House Shake-Up 1974:506). Jackson Harrell, B. L. Ware, and Wil A. Linkugel hypothesize that "Nixon tried to transcend the Watergate question entirely by portraying himself as the guardian of the public interest and casting his accusers as in pursuit of a small matter at the expense of vital political business." (1975:258-9)

One temporarily successful implementation of this strategy occurred on October 25, 1973 when Nixon placed the American military on high alert around the world. He justified it as a response to a Soviet alert and a warning against Soviet intervention in the Middle East (Lang 1983:106). This was a puzzling development as it came at a time of ceasefire but "the adage 'a crisis a day keeps impeachment away' was making the rounds and Nixon was desperately trying to scotch it." (Lang 1983:107) For a brief time, anti-Nixon sentiment dropped but it could not last. Perhaps Watergate was already so pervasive in the news it would take more than a military alert to drive it from the news. Possibly the alert did not matter when one looked at everything

else occurring at the time, the firing of Cox, the release of tape transcripts, and continued Ervin Committee hearings. Whatever the case, Nixon's distractions fell on mostly deaf ears to a public already enraptured by the scandal.

Clinton had moderately more success in refocusing attention away from his scandal. Very early on, he made the point to reassert himself as the leader of the country. In January he stated "I have to get back to work...I've got to go on with the work of the country. I got hired to help the rest of the American people...and we've got a lot to do. I'm going to give them [Congress] the first balanced budget three years ahead of time, and a great child care initiative, and an important Medicare initiative." (Blaney & Benoit 2001:87) Clinton's State of the Union address was an opportunity for both the public and Congress to see his reactions to the allegations. The President rose to the occasion and completely steered the direction of the speech away from the scandal. He did not even mention Lewinsky once, but instead reminded the country of the first balanced budget in thirty years, the peace and prosperity of the United States, and the success of his domestic policies. In addition, he laid out his goals for the following year, which included the lofty aims of "widen[ing] the circle of opportunity, to deepen[ing] the meaning of our freedom, [and] form[ing] that "more perfect union." (State of the Union Address and Republican Response 1999:54) Even with the scandal fresh in the minds of his audience, Clinton received three dozen standing cheers from Democrats and a relatively warm response from Republicans. Denton and Holloway explain that "the public could believe that President Clinton was a sexual maniac while still believing that he was protecting Social Security, education, and other aspects of life that people care a great deal about." (2003:23) In this way the exposure of an extramarital affair simply became unimportant.

This strategy was smart and successful for several reasons. First of all, because much of

his presidency was characterized by peace, prosperity, and a booming economy, Clinton could easily exploit this. He could remind people why they elected and reelected him, and could prove that he had made great improvements to the country. Also, by repeating past successes and, more importantly, future plans Clinton could show the public that he was still doing his job, even though a sex scandal raged around him. He painted an image of himself rising above the scandal and maintaining strong leadership over the country. Finally, focusing on national concerns allowed Clinton to set up a dichotomy between his public and private life. He could sell the idea that the scandal did not have any bearing on his role as president. This would become important later as Clinton worked to control the scope of the scandal and convince people that it was a private matter.

Overall, diverting attention worked at least a little bit for both presidents, although much more successfully for Clinton. It was a smart move for both men to demonstrate their capabilities as leaders and try to not let the scandal take over their presidencies. Of everything that Nixon attempted, this was the most well received, but it could ultimately not turn the tide of disapproval back. For Clinton, his claims held much more merit given the prosperity of the country at the time and the lack of policy relevance associated with the Lewinsky scandal.

Final Strategies

Because the Lewinsky scandal did not involve the administration and focused mainly on just the actions of the president, his White House strategy did not extend beyond denial and diverting attention. Rather, his own personal actions defined much more of his recovery strategy which will be explained in the next section. Nixon and Reagan, however, moved on to other tactics to maximize their chances of survival. Nixon tried several strategies, switching when they failed, whereas Reagan formulated a plan and stuck with it. Nixon attempted to use the FBI and

the CIA, Operation Candor, and impeachment politics. Reagan sought to convince the public of his innocence through claiming ignorance.

When it became clear the Watergate investigation was circling closer and closer to the White House, Nixon employed the two executive agencies that had the potential to completely expose the scandal. First, the CIA was used to obstruct the FBI investigation. As connections were made between the burglars and the White House, the CIA stepped in and falsely claimed that the FBI was interfering with CIA operations. For example “by June 23, 1972, the FBI was tracing the money found in the pockets and in the hotel rooms of the burglars. It was about to trace it to a bank in Mexico City, where a Mexican lawyer had helped to ‘launder’ the money on its way from a wealthy Texas contributor to the Nixon campaign in Washington.” (Mankiewicz 1975:25) The White House then instructed CIA director Richard Helms and deputy director Vernon Walters to state the investigation must be stopped because it was interfering with CIA activities in Mexico, an order with which they quickly complied.

On the other hand, although the FBI was in charge of actively investigating the break in, its entire operation was compromised by the fact that the acting director, Pat Gray, had cultivated a close relationship with John Dean. As soon as the investigation began “Gray directed that all the FBI paperwork on the investigation be sent to his home, including all the teletype messages between different offices and headquarters. He began passing the contents to Dean, eventually handing over bundles of the documents themselves. The White House not only learned what the FBI had done, but it was also informed what it planned to do.” (Emery 1994:196) By receiving this advanced knowledge, Dean and Nixon were able to anticipate what would come next in the investigation and therefore take the proper steps to ensure nothing would be found. This strategy was successful during the initial investigation as the FBI was never able to find anything

incriminating, but it all fell apart when Nixon made the mistake of nominating Pat Gray as the permanent FBI director in February 1973. In his confirmation hearings, Gray admitted to his relationship with Dean under oath testifying that “John Dean had, from the outset, full access to the FBI Watergate investigation; that he (Gray) had frequently discussed the progress of the investigation with the White House; and that he had allowed Dean to sit in on the FBI interviews with Watergate suspects.” (Emery 1994:247) These shocking revelations turned the attention on Dean and the White House and came to be extremely important months later as the House debated impeachment.

When the investigation continued despite Nixon’s efforts, he launched Operation Candor as a way to convince the public that he would be open and honest from that point forward. He promised to speak candidly with the public and hold no more secrets. Nixon made bold, sweeping claims that he was putting everything on the table while only appearing at staged press conferences where “he could appear to be facing the press while actually avoiding sharp questions from an increasingly hostile White House press corps, an ingenious and, he assumed, a foolproof way of calling attention to what his administration had achieved and what it still hoped to achieve.” (Lang 1983:119) His promises of full disclosure soon became scoffed at as just another part of the deception. On November 20 Nixon truly shot himself in the foot when he made the explicit promise of “no more bombshells.” Just one day later, Judge Sirica revealed the existence of an 18 1/2 minute gap in June 20, 1972 tape, just as the conversation between Nixon and Haldeman had turned to a discussion of Watergate (Genovese 1999:43) The White House bombarded the stunned public with excuses and explanations, the most famous being the assertion that Nixon’s secretary Rose Mary Woods caused the gap. In court, she abashedly asserted that she must have mistakenly pressed the wrong button, a defense that the prosecutor

quickly shot down when he demonstrated that the maneuver involved “removing earphones, stretching with her left hand backward to the main desk telephone, lifting the receiver, then, with her right hand, pressing the ‘record’ instead of the ‘stop’ button, all the while keeping the pedal depressed with her left foot on its left ‘forward play’ side.” (Emery 1994:417) In addition to causing utter disbelief among the public, the “Rose Mary stretch” was proven inaccurate after experts concluded the erasure could have only been made manually. Clearly, Nixon was not being as candid as he claimed.

After the near fatal blow it took from the exposure of the tape gaps, Operation Candor officially died the following spring with the release of Nixon’s tax returns. They showed that Nixon, the president of the United States and a very rich man, paid less than many low earning citizens. This “constituted, in the eyes of most people, an admission of guilt that he had indeed evaded substantial amounts of income tax.” (Mankiewicz 1975:167) In addition, this revelation reflected poorly on Nixon’s character and did nothing to help his claim that he was an honest man. In all, Operation Candor was complete and utter failure and turned out to be “hardly more illuminating than the President’s assertion ‘I am not a crook.’” (Operation Candor 1973)

Finally, when none of the other strategies worked and removal from office loomed closer, Nixon’s administration began to play up impeachment politics. First, it advocated a very narrow view of the definition of impeachment. The White House took the hard stance that in order to be impeachable, an offense must also be indictable and legally criminal. If Congress agreed, this would exclude abuses of power, failure to faithfully execute laws, and attacks upon the Constitution (Mankiewicz 1975:180). Furthermore, Nixon claimed that even if he had committed traditionally illegal acts, “(a) a presidential act (order) cannot be illegal; (b) there are times when a president must move beyond the law; and (c) interpreting the Constitution is not the sole

province of the Court – presidents too can interpret the meaning of the Constitution.” (Genovese 1999:70) Nixon basically asserted that Congress could not possibly bring charges of impeachment against him.

Next, the White House began to court members of Congress to try to ensure that Nixon would have the numbers on his side if it came down to a vote. In an effort to garner more support the administration began to tailor “foreign and domestic policy so as to appeal to that combination of southern Democrats and conservative Republicans who made up what the Nixon strategists were counting on – a hard 34 votes in the Senate.” (Mankiewicz 1975:180) These actions included blocking a land-use bill that would harm big real estate developers and vetoing a bill that would reduce gasoline prices which would harm big oil companies. Once the impeachment ball began rolling, however, it could not be stopped as the final release of the White House tapes revealed Nixon’s guilt and the House Judiciary Committee formally agreed on three articles of impeachment.

In contrast, Reagan’s White House put forth only one other recovery strategy which had to address the bigger issue, President Reagan’s involvement. No matter how much blame others took, he would not be exonerated until it was clear whether or not he had been involved in the scandal. At this point the administration had an important decision to make, responsibility or ignorance. On one hand it could deny claims that Reagan was uninvolved in his administration and did not know what was going on by saying he did indeed have knowledge of the arms transfer and the diversion, but may not have known the extent or the illegality of the transactions. On the other hand it could completely deny Reagan knew anything and was therefore totally innocent. This strategy would absolve Reagan of possible illegal activity but he would then face allegations that he was a detached and ineffective president and his administration was running

wild right under his nose. Finally, officials decided they would play the ignorance card, a step that ultimately proved very shrewd. Lawrence Walsh puts it aptly when he says “given a choice of evils, the administration chose to present the president as ignorant. To depict him otherwise, as a central figure in executing two policies he heartily endorsed, might have set in motion a drive for impeachment.” (1997:24)

The first component of Reagan proving his ignorance, as a strategy to prove his innocence, was to concede that an arms for hostage deal had been made. However, he did so by repeatedly insisting that was not his intentions and he had merely sought to improve relations with Iran. The president put this strategy into play in a speech given on March 4. He stated: “a few months ago I told the American people I did not trade arms for hostages. My heart and my best intentions still tell me that’s true, but the fact and the evidence tell me it is not. As the Tower Board reported, what began as strategic opening to Iran deteriorated, in its implementation, into trading arms for hostages. This runs counter to my own beliefs, to administration policy, and to the original strategy we had in mind. There are reasons why it happened, but no excuses. It was a mistake.” (Abshire 2005:147) In a stroke of genius Reagan not only accepted responsibility and admitted what the public already knew, that there had been an arms for hostage deal, but at the same time he completely absolved himself of any guilt. By claiming he had only the best intentions to begin with the president was able to convince much of the public to not tear him to shreds.

Next, Reagan’s administration sought to prove his ignorance by implementing a strategy that went hand in hand with scapegoating. They advocated “the image of the junior officer at the steering wheel with the commander in chief dozing in the rear seat.” (Walsh 1997:23) Obviously, this did not paint the most flattering portrait of the president but it was still preferable to

admitting to impeachable activities. He could endure criticisms that he was uninvolved and could make promises to change his managerial style. What he could not survive, however, was taking responsibility for illegal activities and the sure threat of impeachment. In a November, 1986 speech Reagan says “I directed the Attorney General to undertake a review....[H]is preliminary findings...led me to conclude that I was not fully informed on the nature of one of the activities undertaken in connection with this [Iranian] initiative.” (Anderson 2009:320) Even more, the public was so enamored by Oliver North at this point that it no longer mattered what accusations were made against him. He had proven time and time again that he was a patriot who felt he was doing what was right to secure the freedom of hostages and support the freedom fighters who Reagan had called “the moral equivalent of our founding fathers.”

Finally, Reagan’s innocence through ignorance was made complete by John Poindexter’s testimony before Congress. As National Security Advisor and the person who briefed the president every morning, Poindexter was the figure central to the scandal that would have had the most exposure to the president, other than DCI Casey who had passed away. If Poindexter admitted he had told the president about either operation, Iran or the Contras, the entire White House strategy would crumble. If he didn’t, Reagan would be exonerated and it could be used as proof of his innocence. The heart pounding moment came when Poindexter took the stand to testify. To the immense relief of the White House, he asserted under oath “I made a very deliberate decision not to ask the president [to sign a finding authorizing the Contra diversion], so that I could insulate him from the decision and provide some future deniability for the president if it ever leaked out.” (Walsh 1997:135) Additionally, he “categorically denied North’s assertion that Poindexter had directed him at different times to write five memoranda intended for the president about the diversion that went to the president.” (Abshire 2005:171).

Poindexter's testimony indisputably solidified Reagan's claims of ignorance.

In the final stages of White House strategy, Reagan clearly prevailed over Nixon. Nixon could never claim his ignorance, as it had become clear early on in the Watergate proceedings that he at the very least knew about what was going in his administration. This was proven without a doubt by the White House tapes. In addition, unlike Poindexter's testimony, John Dean's testimony implicated Nixon which sealed his fate and led to charges of impeachment. Finally, it was nearly impossible for Nixon to claim ignorance seeing as the event that unleashed the Watergate scandal, the break in, was orchestrated in order to aid his reelection. In addition, the fact that Nixon had to keep changing his strategies to keep up with the failures hurt him for several reasons. First of all, he could never really expand on one strategy because he had to change them so frequently. In addition, the switching of strategies did not help to convince the public of his trustworthiness. If he was truly innocent, he should have been able to make one claim and stick to it.

The Presidents

In addition to a formulated White House Strategy, the actions of and reactions to the president himself is just as important for successful scandal survival. He is the front man who must win over the public if he wants to overcome scandal. Done correctly, the president's public interactions can negate nearly all else, including a negative media and congressional response.

Cooperation

Because each scandal involved a serious investigation into potentially illegal and immoral activities, the public closely watched each president's cooperation (or lack thereof). When the Watergate investigation came dangerously close to exposing the truth Nixon chose not to cooperate. Rather, he invoked executive privilege at nearly every turn to try to impede it. This

trend began when Congress decided to call John Dean to testify against him. The president immediately saw the danger in this situation and refused to allow it. On March 12, 1973 Nixon released a statement attempting to justify these actions. He claimed that “under the doctrine of separation of powers, the manner in which the President personally exercises his assigned executive powers is not subject to questioning by another branch of Government. If the President is not subject to such questioning, it is equally appropriate that members of his staff not be so questioned, for their roles are in effect an extension of the Presidency.” (Executive Privilege 1974:340) Rather than dampening the pressure on the White House, Nixon’s statements further intensified suspicions. If he had nothing to hide, why would he be so adamant in his refusals to allow his staff to testify? With the public backlash came a slight reversal in Nixon’s position. On March 30 he agreed that staffers could “appear ‘informally’ before the Ervin Committee, under an arrangement to be worked out that safeguarded the separation of powers between the branches of government.” (Emery 1994:291) In all actuality, this was not so much a concession on Nixon’s part but rather a necessary step to avoid a reaction from the Supreme Court.

Under this pressure, and aware of the growing disapproval from the public, Nixon tried to hold on to his executive privilege while acquiescing to some of the demands of the Committee. On April 29, 1974 he made a speech announcing his intent to give the House transcripts of the subpoenaed tapes instead of the actual recordings. He began his speech by again asserting the necessity of executive privilege because “unless a president can protect the privacy of the advice he gets, he cannot get the advice he needs.” (McConnell 2006:39) Then Nixon, with the attitude that he was doing the committee some great favor, explained why he would be generous enough to release the transcripts. He claimed that the House needed them to reach an informed conclusion (that would presumably prove him innocent), their release would restore the principle

of executive privilege itself, and the public was entitled to see the evidence. Nixon concluded this speech by discussing the fact that some of the information might seem incriminating because “in these and all of the other conversations in this office, people have spoken their minds freely, never dreaming that specific sentences or even parts of sentences would be picked out as the subjects of national attention and controversy.” (McConnell 2006:40)

Despite his claims that the tapes must be kept secret for reasons of confidentiality, the Court concluded “that when the ground for asserting privilege as to subpoenaed materials sought for use in a criminal trial is based only on the generalized interest in confidentiality, it cannot prevail over the fundamental demands of due process of law in the fair administration of criminal justice. The generalized assertion of privilege must yield to the demonstrated specific need for evidence in a pending criminal trial.” (Supreme Court on Nixon’s Tapes 1975:624) Clearly, the Supreme Court, Congress, and the public were all fed up with Nixon’s excuses and his sweeping claims of executive privilege ended up doing more harm than good.

Hand in hand with executive privilege, Nixon also made sweeping assertions of national security to justify his unwillingness to cooperate. As the investigation revealed more and more illegal activity, he tapped into the Cold War mentality of the time. The tipping point came when McCord testified about the use of hush money for the burglars that had come from high up in the administration. As fingers began to point towards Nixon, he made a speech on May 22, 1973 in which he brought up the issue of national security. He first stated that the three security operations that had come to light – the 1969-71 wiretaps, the Huston Plan, and the formation of the Plumbers – were all enacted for reasons of national security (Olson 2003:92). Furthermore, he spoke about the criticism that he had impeded the investigation by saying “I wanted justice done with regard to Watergate; but in the scale of national priorities with which I had to deal...I

also had to be deeply concerned with ensuring that neither the covert operations of the CIA nor the operations of the Special Investigations Unit should be compromised.” (Harrell 1975:256) These claims imploded as revealing testimony and evidence came to light. First, Ehrlichman deputy Egil Krogh admitted that the break in was purely an attempt to discredit Ellsberg. Then, Special Counsel to the President Charles Colson pled guilty to obstructing justice in the Ellsberg case, confirming Krogh’s claims. Finally, as if these implications were not enough, White House tape transcripts revealed a conversation between Nixon, Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman, and Director of Domestic Policy John D. Ehrlichman explicitly discussing a strategy where they would claim the break in was for national security reasons in order to keep people from questioning it (Mankiewicz 1975:150). These revelations not only proved Nixon a liar, but also showed the extent he had gone to cover up illicit activities.

While Reagan did not consciously cultivate a cooperative image for the public, he refused from early on to invoke executive privilege. Given that Iran-Contra involved sensitive policy and security decisions, it would not have been surprising if he did, but he instead repeatedly insisted that he wanted to just “get it all out.” (Abshire 2005:190) Reagan gave the very convincing image that he had nothing to hide and knew nothing more than the American people. He cooperated with all the investigative committees and allowed even the most high ranking officials to testify. By taking these steps Reagan ensured that neither Congress nor the American people had any grounds to accuse him of a cover up, even though in retrospect it is clear the administration did just that in November of 1986.

In contrast, Clinton actively worked to craft a public image that would portray himself as a bystander in the investigation, willing to cooperate on every level. In one of his earliest statements he said, “we are doing our best to cooperate here, but we don’t know much yet. And

that's all I can say now. What I'm trying to do is to contain my natural impulses and get back to work. I think it's important that we cooperate. I will cooperate." (Blaney & Benoit 2001:86)

Cooperating with the investigation was not only important for political and legal reasons, the appearance of cooperating projected an image of innocence, whether it was true or not. If Clinton could convince people he looked innocent, perhaps he could convince them that he was innocent. It made him seem open and honest rather than secretive and evasive. In addition, the president "portrayed himself, arguably accurately, as a passive observer, contending that it would be the media that would decide the prominence and magnitude of the story." (Busby, "Defending the American Presidency" 2001:82) By shifting the initiative onto the media, he was putting pressure on them to decide how they would handle the scandal. This then begged the question: would they make a mistake?

Finally, Clinton refused to invoke an executive privilege to impede or hinder the investigation. This showed that he was refusing to focus time and energy on it, reinforcing the White House strategy of refocusing attention. In addition, this move allowed him to avoid the predictably harsh backlash that has come with executive privilege since Watergate. His relative silence with regard to the investigation was well received by the public. In a poll conducted by CBS News respondents were asked "do you want Bill Clinton to say more now about the allegations involving Monica Lewinsky, or are you satisfied to wait until the investigation into these allegations is completed?" 76% of responded that he should wait, and only 19% wanted him to say more on the matter now (CBS News Poll, Feb. 1998).

Interestingly, it was not true cooperation with the investigations that aided Reagan and Clinton, but rather the appearance of doing so. Surely, the fact that Clinton was evasive in his deposition in the Jones case shows that his position towards investigators was not as forthcoming

as it could have been. However, both he and Reagan convinced the public that they were cooperating, and therefore had nothing to hide. This greatly contributed to perceptions of their innocence. Nixon took the opposite stance and attempted to obstruct the investigation every chance he had. Regardless of his excuses of executive privilege and national security, his actions only served to convince the public that he had something to hide.

Responsibility/Secrecy

Alongside cooperation, each president's stance on taking responsibility for the scandal impacted the public response to him. They were faced with the choice to either continue to blame others, evade questions, and deny involvement or to own up to their mistakes and accept accountability. Again like cooperation, the public's perception of how much responsibility the president was taking had an important impact on his recovery.

As Nixon's excuses grew, his public support dwindled and the nickname "tricky Dick" was no longer just a joke. While his claims of executive privilege and national security did little to stem the flow of questions, they also begged the question, why so much secrecy? If the president had nothing to hide, why couldn't his aides testify? Taking this attitude is possibly the worst thing Nixon could have done to prove his innocence. Even with a lack of evidence, he was just digging himself into a hole as his excuses convinced the public that an innocent man does not act that way. The air of concealment only intensified with the White House tape subpoenas, and subsequent refusal to turn over the tapes. On July 16, 1973 Alexander Butterfield revealed the existence of a White House taping system, which immediately launched a struggle that would last for over a year. Special prosecutor Archibald Cox immediately subpoenaed the tapes, which would ostensibly show the extent of Nixon's involvement. The president, however, flatly refused to comply and stated "the tapes are entirely consistent with what I know to be the truth and what

I have stated to be the truth. However, as in any verbatim recording of informal conversations, they contain comments that persons with different perspectives and motivations would inevitably interpret in different ways.” (McConnell 2006:13-14) These events set the stage for the tense battle over the tapes that would slowly, but surely, convince the public that Nixon had something to hide.

After Nixon faced an outcry against his refusal to comply, he backtracked slightly and offered the Stennis Compromise. Under this plan, Senator John Stennis (D-MS), a Nixon supporter, would be allowed to listen to the tapes and verify the accuracy of the transcripts Nixon was willing to release. Unsurprisingly, Cox refused and continued to demand that actual tapes he had requested. Furious, Nixon demanded the firing of Cox in what came to be known as the “Saturday Night Massacre” (Genovese 1999:42-43). Facing even more backlash, Nixon finally agreed to release the subpoenaed tapes to the new special prosecutor, Leon Jaworski. In a Gallup Poll conducted from November 2-4, 1973 the public was asked “do you think the White House tapes that will be delivered to the court will be a true record of what was said, or do you think the tapes will have been altered to remove evidence that showed Nixon was involved in the planning or cover-up of Watergate?” In a clear example of the public’s suspicion of secrecy from the president, 59% of respondents felt the tapes would be altered and only 27% felt they would be a true record (Gallup Poll Nov. 1973). In a major embarrassment it was revealed that two of the nine tapes no longer existed. Furthermore, one tape contained the 18 1/2 minute gap. As previously explained, the White House used the implausible scenario that Rose Mary Woods had accidentally erased part of the tape, which was quickly debunked by the testimony of experts who testified that the gap was caused by manual erasures. The public’s reaction was instantaneous and furious. In a Harris Survey conducted from November 12-15, 1973 a sample

of adults were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement “the two missing tapes were ordered destroyed because they would have proved Nixon knew about the Watergate cover-up.” Unsurprisingly, 47% agreed and only 27% disagreed (Harris Survey, Nov. 1973).

The secrets continued for the next year as the House Judiciary Committee demanded 42 additional tapes in its impeachment investigation. Again, Nixon refused to comply exactly with the subpoena. Instead, he would offer nearly 1,300 pages of tape transcripts. In a speech on April 29, 1974 Nixon stated that the tapes “include all the relevant portions of all the subpoenaed conversations that were recorded, that is, all portions that relate to the question of what I know about Watergate or the coverup and what I did about it.” (McConnell 2006:38) Again, Nixon clearly misjudged the public’s reaction as 67% of the public gave him an overall negative rating when asked “how would you rate President Nixon on...His turning over 1,300 pages of (Watergate) transcripts from edited tapes--excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?” from May 4-7, 1974 (Harris Survey May 1974). Nixon’s reaction did nothing to abate the sentiment that he was hiding something. House Speaker Carl Albert voiced what many were feeling when he asked “why substitute other evidence when the direct evidence [the actual tapes] is available?” (McConnell 2006:16)

While Nixon chose to retreat into secrecy and evasiveness, Reagan came forward and accepted responsibility for the actions of his administration. Although he had begun to win over the public with his White House strategy, he was completely absolved of guilt yet. Reagan still had to contend with the fact that illegal activities had taken place in his administration and that he had engaged in an arms for hostage deal, whether he realized it or not. Although Poindexter had absolved the president of responsibility he still made it a point to state “[y]et the buck does not stop with Admiral Poindexter, as he stated in his testimony; it stops with me. I am the one

who is ultimately accountable to the American people. The Admiral testified that he wanted to protect me; yet no president should ever be protected from the truth.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:156) He played the part of a beleaguered but innocent man extremely well, and taking these steps allowed him to retain his dignity while still addressing the scandal. In a conclusion to a speech made after the publication of the Tower Report Reagan stated “you take your knocks, you learn your lessons, and then you move on. That’s the healthiest way to deal with a problem...And if you’ve lived your life properly – so you learn. You put things in perspective. You pull your energies together. You change. You go forward.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:132) In this way Reagan at the same time accepted responsibility yet took the initiative to move past the scandal and return to policymaking.

Like Reagan, Clinton also chose to take responsibility and own up to his immoral actions, although he held onto the claim that they were not illegal. He could no longer deny the relationship because it was not necessarily believable given his reputation as a womanizer. Moreover, the evidence became overwhelming when on July 28 Lewinsky agreed to cooperate with the investigation in exchange for immunity and reports of DNA evidence on the infamous blue dress surfaced. Finally, Clinton admitted to his affair with Lewinsky, shocking very few in the process. Clinton’s speech on August 17 marked the beginning of this stage with his statement “indeed I did have a relationship with Miss Lewinsky that was not appropriate. In fact, it was wrong. It constituted a critical lapse in judgment and a personal failure on my part for which I am solely and completely responsible.” (Blaney & Benoit 2001:89) He admitted his mistake but did so in a depoliticized way, which cast him “as an ordinary citizen who had suffered public humiliation.” (Busby, “Defending the American Presidency” 2001:78) Less than two weeks later, Clinton made another statement where he “abandoned the self-centeredness...; he

abandoned the evasiveness...; he abandoned the pontifications...; and he abandoned the legalisms. In their stead, he substituted a self-reflexiveness and a generosity of spirit.” (Denton & Holloway 2003:208) Clinton became personable and relatable to public as just another man who had made a mistake. He seemed genuinely upset by his actions, and genuinely humbled and apologetic.

Finally, Clinton completed his rhetoric of apology on September 11 with a speech at the White House Prayer Breakfast. He said “if my repentance is genuine and sustained, and if I can maintain both a broken spirit and a strong heart, then good can come of this for our country as well as for me and my family....The children of this country can learn in a profound way that integrity is important and selfishness is wrong, but God can change us and make us strong at the broken places.” (The Starr Report 1998:xxii) The speech was a smashing success. Clinton invoked the appropriate amount of religious undertones, painted himself as a sympathetically broken yet strong man rebuilding his life, and managed to turn a negative situation into a positive lesson for the country. With this type of rhetoric Clinton admitted to an illicit affair with a woman in her twenties and still maintained the support of the public who seemed to adopt the attitude that everyone makes mistakes. It is important to remember, however, that Clinton’s apologizes and admissions did *not* extend to the allegations of perjury and obstruction of justice. He used semantics to deal with that issue.

Accepting responsibility allowed Reagan and Clinton to do several things. They reasserted themselves as the head of the administration, reinforcing the image that they would continue to lead the country. In addition, it improved images of trustworthiness to the public who wanted the president to be truthful and own up to his actions. Nixon, however, continued to act secretive and refused to accept responsibility for his and his administration’s illegal actions. Not

only did this not endear him to the public, it also allowed people to assume the worst. If Nixon was working so hard to hide what had happened, one could conclude that it must be much worse than anyone had anticipated.

Public Perception of Personality

Finally, each president's attitude towards the public and how the citizenry perceived the president as a person played a role in their scandal recovery. Regardless of their views on the negative aspects of the scandals, whether that included illegal activity or not, the public could still support the president if they liked him a person. People can forgive remarkably easily if they do not believe the president is an inherently immoral person. This proved true for both Reagan and Nixon, but again not for Nixon.

When the Watergate tapes and transcripts were released, one of the biggest unintended consequences was the disgust of the public at Nixon's language and tone. Regardless of the disturbing content, this gave the public a feel for who the president was as a man, and they were not impressed. In one editorial the Chicago Tribune stated, "now in about 300,000 words we have seen the private man and we are appalled." (Nixon on White House Transcripts 1975:289) The first issue to arise was the foul language used without regard among White House officials. While strong language is understandable in high stress situations, and must be commonplace in the White House, Nixon "had during his campaign in 1960 made much of Harry Truman's use of vulgar language, and who had lectured the American people about the need to elect him so that children could know that decent language was being used in the White House." (Mankiewicz 1975:175) Clearly, Nixon did not hold himself to such a standard as shown by a statement made in a meeting on March 22, 1973 concerning *Washington Post* attorney Edward Bennett Williams. He candidly stated, "I think we are going to fix the son of a bitch. Believe me. We are going to.

We've got to, because he's a bad man." (Genovese 1999:24)

In addition to the expletives, the transcripts were laced with sections marked "unintelligible", "inaudible", and "characterization deleted". Not only did this contribute to the notion of Nixon's secrecy, they showed that he was not the upstanding leader he claimed to be throughout the entire scandal. Mankiewicz puts it succinctly when he says, "what emerged from the totality of the conversations was a devious, profane, shallow man in the presidency, incapable of making the simplest decision and growing more and more conscious with each passing day of the necessity to conceal the evidence of his own misdeeds." (1975:174). If Nixon thought the release of the altered transcripts in the summer of 1974 would save him, he was sorely mistaken and seriously misjudged the reaction the public would have to even the non-incriminatory conversations.

In Iran-Contra, however, the public was very receptive towards President Reagan due to his enormous personal popularity. Over the course of his two terms Reagan had captured the hearts and minds of the American public. He won a landslide reelection victory in 1984 garnering 525 electoral votes as opposed to Walter Mondale's 13 (www.historycentral.com). He had restored glory to office of president after a string of failures that included Lyndon Johnson and the Vietnam War, Richard Nixon and Watergate, and Jimmy Carter and the original Iran hostage crisis. Harvard scholar Richard Neustadt remarked Reagan "was the last Roosevelt Democrat we shall see as president. [His] presidency restored the public image of the office to a fair (if perhaps rickety) approximation of its Roosevelt mold: a place of popularity, influence, and initiative...like or hate politics – a presence many of us loved to see as Chief of State." (Abshire 2005:198) Even when the public was disgusted with the government and felt they had been deceived, Reagan's personal approval ratings remained high. In July 1987 respondents were

asked “apart from whether you approve or disapprove of the way Reagan is handling his job as president, what do you think of Reagan as a person? Would you say you approve or disapprove?” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:175) Surprisingly, 72% approved. This shows that the public was willing to forgive Reagan and still had faith in him as a man. If this attitude did not exist it is likely Reagan would have never recovered. Even after the scandal had been fully exposed “Ronald Reagan left office with the highest approval ratings of any president since FDR: 63 percent in the Gallup poll and 68 percent in the *New York Times*-CBS poll.” (Abshire 2005:197)

Perhaps more so than Nixon and Reagan, Clinton was acutely aware of how to deal with the public and how to win it over. First, he worked exceptionally hard to convince people of his legal innocence through the use of semantics and wording. He had already admitted to the affair and accepted that his actions were morally wrong. However, he refused to admit to the charge that he had lied under oath about the relationship in the Jones deposition. He was asked “have you ever had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky as that term is defined in Deposition Exhibit I, as modified by the Court.?” (Kalb 2001:69) Clinton thought carefully for a minute then replied in the negative. To most people it seemed that he was denying any type of sexual relationship with Ms. Lewinsky, but Clinton’s answer hinged on the phrase “as that term is defined in Deposition Exhibit I.” The judge approved the definition as “when the person knowingly engages in or causes...contact with the genitalia, anus, groin, breast, inner thigh, or buttocks of any person with an intent to arouse or gratify the sexual desire of any person.” (The Starr Report 1998:138) When Clinton specified that *he* did not have sexual relations with *her* he had found a loophole in the wording of the definition that would absolve him of guilt. It was a tricky solution that hinged on a very strict reading. This issue became even more important when

Clinton faced impeachment charges. White House Counsel Charles F.C. Ruff defended the president with the following reasoning “if answers are literally truthful but misleading, there is no perjury, as a matter of law, no matter how misleading the testimony is or is intended to be.” (The Starr Report 1998:xxi) His defense on impeachment thus relied on the vagueness of questioning and the explicit wording of the legal definition.

When Clinton could not word his way out of a problem, he employed two other linguistic strategies. First of all if he knew an answer would implicate him, he would answer noncommittally and claim that he did not recall or did not remember what had happened. This was especially true when it came to questions about the alleged gifts exchanged between the president and Lewinsky. The second strategy Clinton used was to flip the questions on the investigators. Rather than focus on the big questions: did he have an affair and did he lie about it?, Clinton concentrated on a “series of ridiculously small ones: is a president ‘alone’ with a woman if there’s a Secret Service agent standing outside the door? Did people believe Lewinsky that the president had fondled her breasts and genitals, or Clinton that he had not?” (Harris 2005:341) This was an extremely smart move because people did not really care about these issues. It not only made them lose interest but also convinced them that these were not things that necessitated impeachment (Harris 2005:341) Clinton’s use of words, along with various other factors, helped bring more of the public onto his side, absolved himself legally, and inserted doubt into the impeachability of his offenses.

On a more personal level Clinton invoked the rhetoric of family and privacy to garner sympathy and provide justification of his actions. First of all, while Clinton continued to claim he had lied about the affair in a legal sense he had no other choice but to concede that he had lied about it in almost any other sense. He then had to defend his reasons for this decision and chose

to claim that he had lied to protect his family from embarrassment (Blaney & Benoit 2001:90). People could believe that Clinton, although president, was just a man who wanted to protect his wife and teenage daughter from the humiliation that would come if the whole world found out he was cheating. If he had only lied to shield his family and not to obstruct the Starr investigation, the public could find ways to forgive.

This strategy also worked well for Clinton because it enforced the idea that this was strictly a private matter. On two separate occasions he remarked “it is private, and I intend to reclaim my family life for my family. It’s nobody’s business but ours.” (Blaney & Benoit 2001:89) and “even presidents have private lives.” (Denton & Holloway 2003:180) When Clinton called for privacy and the media and Starr continued to pry, it garnered sympathy for him and his family. Suddenly, they were posited as the villains, not him. Finally, Clinton’s claims that this was a private matter were important in his legal defense. Still continuing to claim that had not lied under oath, Clinton reasoned that the only thing he was guilty of was an extramarital affair. Then, “he argued that since the allegations at hand were irrelevant to his presidency, they were beyond any public scrutiny or concern.” (Blaney & Benoit 2001:89) By his reasoning, if they were not of concern to the public then they were certainly not impeachable offenses. Clinton’s use of privacy and his family therefore helped him with both his personal popularity and his legal situation.

As evidenced by all three situations, the public response to the president as a person could significantly help or harm his recovery. The prevailing view of Nixon as a generally bad person added to the negativity and suspicion surrounding him, and did nothing to sway public opinion to his side. The overwhelmingly positive image of Reagan as a the amiable, trustworthy, and grandfatherly “Gipper” made people reluctant to believe that he had knowingly committed

illegal operations. Finally, Clinton's public strategy provided people with information that both legally and morally justified his actions.

When it came to mastering an internal strategy it is clear that both Reagan and Clinton had immense success. They captured the hearts and minds of the public, found acceptably justifiable reasons for their actions, and insulated themselves from the majority of future attacks. They were able to face the investigations and the media with the support of the citizenry, who largely defended them even when the outlook seemed bleak. Nixon on the other hand came across as petty, secretive, and, most importantly, guilty. Not only did the public remain unconvinced by any of his many White House strategies, it also disapproved of him as a person in general. The coming investigations and media attacks only reinforced this image and allowed the public to solidly coalesce against the president.

External Factors

Just as important as White House strategies and presidential reactions in scandal recovery are the external factors not under the administration's control. The investigative committees, the media, and the context of the time all influenced the public's receptiveness to recovery tactics in both positive and negative ways. In addition, a lot of the information sent to the public was colored by these factors. Importantly, while some of these external aspects could theoretically spell disaster for the president, the public was willing to ignore them if they had already decided to side with him.

Investigative Committees

Because each scandal involved potentially illegal activities, investigations were quickly launched to root out the guilt or innocence of the president and to consider the possibility of impeachment. First, the executive branch appointed a special prosecutor – later called the

independent counsel – to lead an outside investigation. Then, Congress generally conducted its own investigation, holding hearings and listening to witness statements. If it were deemed necessary, the House Judiciary Committee would meet to debate grounds for impeachment, sending the articles to the full House if it saw fit.

Special Prosecutor/Independent Counsel

The office of the special prosecutor presented a curious situation in scandal politics. It generally pitted man against president and let the public decide whose side to take. The special prosecutor could potentially expose the wrongdoing of the administration, but it could also inadvertently shift public opinion onto the side of the president. If the public saw the investigation as unfair, biased, or inaccurate people would express support for the president just to show displeasure with the prosecutor.

When the extent of the illegal activities involved in Watergate became evident, the Attorney General quickly appointed Archibald Cox as special prosecutor. Not only did Nixon initially hold animosity towards the Kennedyesque Cox, his anger escalated when Richardson “delegated the attorney general’s ‘full authority’ to Cox to investigate not just Watergate but ‘...all offenses arising out of the 1972 presidential election for which the Special Prosecutor deems it necessary and appropriate to assume responsibility, allegations involving the President, members of the White House staff or presidential appointees.’” (Emery 1994:357) Cox quickly set to work gathering evidence against the president and his staff, but the bombshell Butterfield revelation initiated the showdown that would develop between him and Nixon. After the initial tape subpoena and proposed Stennis Compromise, Cox made a statement where he “painstakingly explained his dissatisfactions with the Nixon proposal: the legal difficulties of going to trial without the best evidence, the vagueness of the White House plans for editing the

tapes, and so forth.” (Lang 1983:99) Not only did Cox win over public sentiment with his logic, the image he projected earned its trust and confidence. He appeared “folksy, unpretentious, [and] disarming” which presented a stark dichotomy to Nixon who came off secretive and suspicious (Lang 1983:99).

Nixon’s reaction to Cox’s unyielding demands set the stage for the “Saturday Night Massacre” which would result in a deafening outcry from the public that would play a role in toppling the Nixon presidency. Furious over Cox’s demands, Nixon ordered him, as a member of the executive branch, to cease his attempts to gain the tapes. Cox again refused and Nixon took the dramatic step of ordering Attorney General Richardson to fire Cox. However, he severely miscalculated Richardson’s reaction, who refused and resigned. Nixon then turned to Deputy Attorney General William D. Ruckelshaus who also refused and resigned. Finally, Solicitor General Robert H. Bork complied with Nixon’s demand. That night, Nixon’s press secretary announced the resignations of Richardson and Ruckelshaus and the firing of Cox to a stunned public (Olson 2003:117-118).

The backlash against the Massacre was immediate and intense as many Americans felt Nixon had abused his power and was actively working to obstruct the investigation. John Chancellor of NBC announced “all of this adds up to...a grave and profound crisis in which the President has set himself against his own Attorney General and the Department of Justice....What it means is that the worst dream of everybody who is worried about the President’s secret tapes have become true.” (Lang 1983:102) Realizing he had created a crisis for himself, Nixon finally released the tapes, which ultimately lead to another disaster with the missing tapes and 18 1/2 minute gap. Regardless of his panicked cooperation, when a Harris Survey asked the public “How would you rate President Nixon on...His firing of Archibald Cox--

excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?”, 66% gave him an “only fair” or “poor” rating and only 17% rated him “pretty good” or “excellent” (Harris Survey Oct. 1973).

After Cox’s firing and the catastrophic “Saturday Night Massacre”, Nixon appointed Leon Jaworski as the new special prosecutor. Because of his background as an “establishment lawyer”, Nixon thought Jaworski “would appear to be contributing the work of the Special Prosecutor while in fact selling it out.” (Mankiewicz 1975:51) Unfortunately for the president, however, Jaworski had other ideas and immediately continued on Cox’s established course, even keeping the former prosecutor’s entire staff. In addition, because of the public backlash, Jaworski was given full independence, which he completely intended to capitalize on. Jaworski’s investigation ultimately greatly contributed to Nixon’s downfall as he later told the press “that it was not long after he assumed office that he began to realize that the trail of crime led straight to the Oval Office.” (Mankiewicz 1975:63) Furthermore, Nixon’s forced compliance with Jaworski’s subsequent subpoenas led to the discovery of the March 21, 1973 tape that proved Nixon knew about the cover up earlier than he claimed. The actions of the special prosecutors and Nixon’s reactions to their demands were instrumental in killing his presidency.

In contrast, the independent counsel’s investigation in Iran-Contra led by Lawrence Walsh actually aided in Reagan’s recovery for many reasons. After the publication of the Tower Report and the Congressional hearings that had turned into a media circus, Congress was content with accepting the conclusions the report had made and did not desire a more broad inquiry. It began to work against Walsh by immunizing witnesses to protect them from prosecution. For example Senator Rudman of New Hampshire insisted “once more that the only Iran-Contra crime worth prosecuting was North’s possible destruction of government documents [... deriding] the notion that more complex crimes had been committed: ‘if they go with some grand,

wild conspiracy case, you're going to have a hell of a time proving it....The Congress has really got to get on with this." (Walsh 1997:93) Had they worked together instead of against each other, Congress and the Independent Counsel would have been a formidable force facing the White House.

Another reason that Walsh's investigation did not hurt President Reagan was that it started at the bottom of the administration, investigating subordinates and aides. Like the Tower Commission and the Congressional hearings it focused on North and Poindexter, which partially limited its appeal to the public. However, unlike the other investigative agencies, Walsh and his team took an incredibly thorough and in depth look at any and all illegal activities. As a result, it took years for them to reach the highest levels of government. By that time Reagan had been out of office for a significant amount of time, had aged, and had solidified in the public's mind as a beloved leader. When he was brought to testify in the trial of John Poindexter the Washington Post reported "of all Ronald Reagan's television performances, this was the least enjoyable....It wasn't a pretty picture....it wasn't nice to see a beloved former president subjected to this kind of indignity, being questioned by mere lawyers, sitting in a witness stand, even having to spell his name to the court reporter – which Reagan dutifully and cheerfully did." (Walsh 1997:241) In addition it is likely he was already suffering from Alzheimer's which left his memory impaired and made it impossible for Walsh to even consider prosecuting him.

Walsh's investigation was also unsuccessful because it took years longer than had been expected and cost millions of dollars. The public saw a group of men who by September 1990 had already spent \$25 million (Walsh 1997:263). Chief counsel for the Senate investigation Arthur Liman explained "I think what happened is that the investigation just went on much too long....The attention span of the public is very short. If an independent counsel is to retain the

confidence of the public, he must proceed with an investigation much more promptly, as if he is operating with a shorter statute of limitations.” (Walsh 1997:439) Unfortunately for Walsh, his investigation went on until August 1993, nearly seven years after the scandal broke. In addition he came under harsh criticism for his personal expenses paid for by taxpayers dollars, including weekly travel between Washington D.C. and Oklahoma City and a rented room in the Watergate hotel. This resulted in personal attacks against Walsh and the sparse amount of public support he received soon waned.

Finally, attacks from Congress led by Bob Dole helped to bring down Walsh’s investigation. As the investigation dragged on and he continued to indict former Reagan officials, Congressional Republicans’ anger over his actions grew. They threatened to filibuster the renewal of the Independent Counsel Act and Dole sent an official request to the Attorney General asking him to terminate Walsh’s appointment. More damaging than these official actions, however, were the personal attacks that came from Congress. He was characterized as an implacable and ruthless prosecutor who would stop at nothing to achieve his selfish goals. Many congressmen felt he was hounding and chasing suspects years after the alleged events had taken place. The Navy Secretary called Walsh a “sleazy bounty hunter” (Walsh 1997:440) and Bob Dole asserted “Mr. Walsh and his highly paid assassins saw Mr. Weinberger as a way to get at their ultimate target – President Reagan. They threatened Mr. Weinberger that unless he testified that President Reagan violated the law, they would see that he indicted. To his credit, Mr. Weinberger refused to buckle under to this blackmail.” (Walsh 1997:417) With this complete lack of public or congressional support Lawrence Walsh really had no chance of touching Reagan.

In charge of the Office of the Independent Counsel during the Lewinsky scandal was

Kenneth Starr. He quickly compiled a report of presidential misdeeds and released the findings of his investigation to Congress, who subsequently released it to the public. Starr's report detailed the affair and identified several offenses that he found impeachable, including perjury and obstruction of justice. Starr clearly believed in Clinton's guilt and was confident in his case for impeachment, but the public reaction to his report turned opinion solidly against him, creating more of a shift in favor of the president. First of all, the overly explicit content of the report infuriated many people. Starr painstakingly reported every detail of the affair, not editing out offensive, and sometimes irrelevant, information. The report was made available on the Internet and therefore accessible to almost everyone, including children. Not only was the public angry over the details of Starr's report, Clinton's team used it as part of his defense stating "the OIC report is left with nothing but the details of a private sexual relationship, told in graphic detail with the intent to embarrass. Given the flimsy and unsubstantiated basis for the accusation, there is a complete lack of any credible evidence to initiate an impeachment inquiry concerning the President." (Busby, "Defending the American Presidency" 2001:131)

Starr's investigation also ultimately aided Clinton because it was framed as a personal and political vendetta against the president. From within the White House, Rahm Emmanuel quipped "[Starr] started investigating a 24-year-old real estate deal and now he's investigating a 24-year-old young lady, and the only common thread I can find – and I'm not a lawyer – is that they're both 24 years old." (Kalb 2001:233) The administration also attacked Starr for leaking information to the media, which fed into attacks on the president. Whether or not he actually did, the public thought he did as evidenced by Busby's finding that "a majority of those polled in the spring of 1998 believ[ed] that Starr was 'involved in a systematic campaign to leak information in order to damage Clinton'." (2001:120) It is possible that the public did not necessarily support

Clinton but their disapproval of Starr led to a more favorable opinion of him.

Because the special prosecutor was not an institution the public commonly faced, it formed its opinions on a case-by-case basis, with little preexisting notions. People therefore had the option of siding with or against the prosecutor. In Watergate, the public threw much of their support behind Cox and Jaworski after seeing Nixon's actions during the Saturday Night Massacre and the secrecy he clung to. In Iran-Contra, however, Walsh came into conflict with Congress, started at the bottom with subordinates and was never able to really touch Reagan. More importantly, he took way too long and spent far too much money to be popular with the public. Finally, in the Lewinsky scandal Starr faced extreme public criticism due to the explicit nature of his report and the supposed political vendetta against Clinton, which resulted in a surge of support for the president.

Middle Investigations

Subsequent to, and sometimes concurring with, the special prosecutor's inquiry were other investigations that would heavily contribute to the decisions of the final committees. These were the Ervin Committee in Watergate, the executive branch appointed Tower Commission in Iran-Contra, and the House Judiciary Committee in the Lewinsky affair. Because these occurred at the intermediate stage, they built off of the findings of the special prosecutor and then made recommendations for further action.

The Senate established the Ervin Committee after the Watergate grand jury released its findings. Fully aware of the gravity of the situation it set to work compiling witness lists and scheduling hearings. In the first few weeks of its tenure it uncovered much more than anticipated. First, John Dean gave his shocking testimony against the president, and then Alexander Butterfield revealed the taping system. This set off a situation similar to that of the

special prosecutor where the Committee demanded the tapes and issued subpoenas and Nixon flatly refused. Like Cox, the Ervin Committee did not accept this and Nixon found himself sharply at odds with yet another investigative body. Nixon's reaction "prompted Senator Ervin to scorn and to the suggestion that the President's idea of the separation of powers was 'to separate a congressional committee from access to the truth.'" (The Battle Lines Are Drawn 1973:12)

Realizing he did not have the public's support on the issue of the tapes, Nixon attempted to convince people to turn against the Committee. First, the White House hoped that it could make the hearings so boring that people would not want to watch. Specifically, it tried to convince Dean to give a report with new facts before the hearings began, so by the time they happened it would be old news to the public (Lang 1983:69). Of course, Dean eventually turned against Nixon and provided extremely damaging testimony. Next, Nixon and his administration attacked the hearings by "questioning the legitimacy of parading witnesses continuously before TV cameras and radio microphones." (Lang 1983:69) Instead, to his detriment, they enraptured the public.

Most importantly, the Ervin Committee, working alongside the special prosecutor, revealed the extent of White House involvement. Without the revelations that resulted from a deep investigation by Ervin and his colleagues, questions about Watergate may have stopped with the grand jury's indictment of the burglars. Instead, the hearings "had a monumental impact. They caught and sustained the nation's interest. Dean's testimony focused attention on Nixon's role in the cover-up, and a sufficient number of the president's aides had detailed their involvement to convince the majority of Americans, 73 percent according to the Gallup Poll, that Nixon was involved." (Olson 2003:108) Without the Ervin Committee, it is possible that Nixon's downfall would not have been so imminent.

The Tower Commission, unlike the Ervin Committee, was appointed by the executive branch to lead an internal investigation into Iran-Contra. The Tower Report aided President Reagan's recovery in two important ways. First of all it exonerated Reagan from most wrongdoing. Although it soundly concluded that there had been an arms for hostage deal and that a diversion of funds had indeed gone to the Contras, the report placed the blame mostly on Reagan's subordinates. David Abshire explains "the board was convinced that the president wanted the full story to be told. On the other hand, the report highlighted the misleading statements of North, McFarlane, Poindexter, and Regan in their attempt to 'distance' or protect Reagan from the scandal." (2005:131) In addition, the Tower Report decidedly stated that there was no smoking gun that would implicate Reagan with the lines "the president said he had no knowledge of the diversion prior to his conversation with Attorney General Meese on November 25, 1986. No evidence has come to light to suggest otherwise." (Abshire 2005:133) Thus, the Tower Report basically constituted a slap on the wrist for the president and an admonishment of his ignorance, but it had no lasting political implications for him.

The second reason the Tower Report was so instrumental in aiding presidential recovery was the timing with which it was released. Its members were appointed by the executive branch and generally supportive of Reagan so it is likely that this was a conscious move. As the Congressional committees and the Independent Counsel took longer to make conclusions, the Tower Report set the tone for how the public would respond to the others. Because of its star studded panel the report was considered credible and became widely accepted. Its lack of implications for the president convinced much of the public that he was innocent. Lawrence Walsh explains this when he says the Tower Report "reinforced the notion that Iran-Contra had been a limited conspiracy that flourished in the misuse and misconduct of the NSC staff.

Accordingly, the report fueled the clamor of those who, for political purposes, wanted to put an end to further investigation.” (1997:71) As it was pretty much taken at face value, the report began to end any desire by the public to implicate the president.

In an interesting twist, the intermediate investigation in the Lewinsky scandal was the deliberation of impeachment in the House Judiciary Committee. Because congressional committees are microcosms of the full House, the majority and ranking members were all Republicans. To make matters potentially worse for Clinton, “the Judiciary panel ha[d] become a bastion of each party’s ideological philosophy rather than a cohesive bipartisan body working out necessary compromises in a complex decision-making process.” (Rae & Campbell 2004:7) As a result, the Judiciary Committee collapsed into a bickering mess with the inability to form a cohesive argument in favor of impeachment. In addition, it did not endear the members to the public. The Committee did not call any new witnesses or find any new evidence, which left little reason for the Democrats to jump ship and side with the Republican majority

The House Judiciary Committee also had trouble coping with the White House’s response to the allegations. While it focused on the legal ramifications of perjury and obstruction of justice, Clinton’s team emphasized the aspects of privacy and sex. Chairman Hyde remarked “the White House spin was that ‘everybody does it,’ ‘it’s all about sex,’ and that we were ‘puritanical’ supporters of the religious right. We were focusing on perjury and obstruction of justice, which were public acts not private acts, but their spin was wonderfully effective and made good copy.” (Rae & Campbell 2004:70) With the public on the president’s side, the Committee Democrats had even more incentive to vote against the impeachment articles as shown by the ranking Democrat’s comment that “under our constitutional system of government, if the president misbehaves in a way that does not impact on his official duties, the remedy still

lies in the voting booth and not in a legislative takeover of the executive branch.” (House Judiciary Committee on Impeachment 1999:697)

It is difficult to draw concrete conclusions from the intermediate investigations because they had major influences on the final investigations. It is important to note, however, that they did release important information and give some sort of impression to the public. The Ervin Committee helped reveal the extent of illegal activities and to solidify Nixon’s guilt. Despite the attempts of the president to prevent it, the public became enraptured by the hearings and wholly supportive of the committee. The Tower Commission, on the other hand, relieved Reagan of much of the accusations of guilt and he remained popular with the public. In the most interesting case, the Republican led House Judiciary Committee continued to pursue Clinton’s guilt, but never gained public support. Instead it faced scorn and anger from Americans and from Democrats in Congress who had already decided that Clinton’s offenses were not impeachable.

Final Investigations

Finally, after the special prosecutors and the intermediary investigations, the scandal inquiries progressed to their final stage. The House Judiciary began to debate impeachment in the Watergate case, Congress held joint hearings in Iran-Contra, and the full House and Senate considered the impeachment articles against Clinton sent from the House Judiciary Committee. The outcomes of these final stages determined the last word that the public would hear on the president’s supposed guilt or innocence. However, like the other investigations, these were also subject to much public scrutiny. Consequently, declarations of guilt had little to no bearing on a generally unsupportive and unhappy public.

After the special prosecutor and Ervin Committee had uncovered a staggering number of reasons to believe in Nixon’s guilt, the House Judiciary Committee met and issued a final

subpoena for 42 more tapes. When Nixon attempted to substitute edited transcripts instead the outraged Committee took the ultimate step and began to debate impeachment. Meanwhile, the battle for the tapes reached the Supreme Court where on July 24, 1974 it ruled that executive privilege does not protect the president against all subpoenas. It stated "to read the Article II powers of the President as providing an absolute privilege as against a subpoena essential to enforcement of criminal statutes on no more than a generalized claim of the public interest in confidentiality of nonmilitary and nondiplomatic discussions would upset the constitutional balance of 'a workable government' and gravely impair the role of the courts under Article III [of the Constitution]." (Supreme Court on Nixon's Tapes 1975:623) It concluded that the need for evidence was more important than confidentiality in this situation and ordered Nixon to release the tapes. This ruling would have dire consequences for Nixon's presidency.

Realizing he had to make a last, desperate attempt to save himself, Nixon hoped he could undermine the legitimacy of the House Judiciary Committee by attacking it from the outside. First, the White House embarked on its campaign of impeachment politics whereby it attempted to dispute the idea that Nixon had committed impeachable offenses. Then, it attacked the Committee itself hoping to play up partisan politics. Unfortunately for Nixon, bipartisanship became the focal point of the Committee. Acutely aware of the devastating damage partisan bickering could do to their mission, Committee Chairman Peter Rodino made it his job to "pacify the extremes and allow the middle to emerge." (Lang 1983:144) Furthermore, by the end of debates Rodino had "earned the trust of committee members, Republicans and Democrats alike. No last-minute broadsides from anti-impeachment forces could undo that." (Lang 1983:146) The bipartisanship of the Committee insulated it from a lot of attacks from the White House and proved to the public that they were a serious and committed group of Senators from both parties,

who would not allow bickering to upset their incredibly serious task.

Finally, after obtaining the most important White House tapes and convincing the public of the legitimacy of their work, the House Judiciary Committee voted on three articles of impeachment, which would then go to the House of Representatives for a full vote. After a thorough and detailed investigation, the Committee had amassed enough evidence to charge the president. The Committee (including all 17 Republican members) voted affirmatively on three impeachment articles: “Article I: Participation in the Cover-Up Scandal”, “Article: Abuse of Presidential Powers”, and “Article III: Failure to Cooperate with Investigators” (McConnell 2006:48-51). All of this was done in front of TV cameras and with reporters relaying the details of the proceedings. Because the public was able to see the work of the Committee, “the hearings had...legitimate[d] the *process* by which Nixon was ousted from the Presidency....It had become more difficult for anyone to make a convincing case that Nixon had been denied due process and was being ousted from office in a political coup d’état.” (Lang 1983:38)

Clearly, the most important result to come from all three investigative bodies was the release of the White House Tapes. The yearlong battle over the tapes not only convinced the public that Nixon had something to hide, but also provided concrete evidence of his wrongdoing. The original subpoena from the special prosecutor resulted in the release of the March 21, 1973 tape in which Nixon and Dean explicitly discuss hush money to pay the defendants. Speaking to Dean Nixon states, “what I meant is, you could, you could get a million dollars. And you could get it in cash. I, I know where it could be gotten.” (Genovese 1999:149) A year later, the other shoe dropped and, after the Supreme Court’s ruling, what came to be known as “the smoking gun” tape was released. Dating back to June 23, 1972, this conversation between Nixon and Haldeman proved beyond a doubt that Nixon not only knew about the cover up months before he

admitted he had, but he also was an active player in obstructing justice (Self-Incriminating Nixon Tapes 1975). Knowing the tapes would prove this, Nixon released a statement only admitting “portions of the tapes of these June 23 conversations are at variance with certain of my previous statements.” (Self-Incriminating Nixon Tapes 1975:681) Yet, for the most part, he still maintained his innocence and his position that what was revealed on the tapes did not justify impeachment. The public, however, felt very different and overwhelmingly believed in his guilt. In a Roper Report from August 31, respondents were asked “Do you think [Nixon] was clearly guilty of the more serious of the charges against him, probably guilty, probably not guilty, or definitely not guilty?” An astounding 82% responded with “clearly guilty” or “probably guilty” (Roper Report 74-8, Aug, 1974).

Because Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh and the Tower Commission were both technically executive branch agencies, Congress launched its own investigation into Iran-Contra, holding hearings and debating Reagan’s guilt. As opposed to the legislative situation Nixon faced, Congress was very reluctant to launch a vindictive attack on the very popular president. Although Democrats controlled the legislature, they “were cautious and tentative, conscious that any scathing attack on Reagan could lead to charges of vindictiveness and unscrupulous political action at a time of crisis.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:111) Reagan, a Republican, was popular and warmly regarded and the Democrats knew they could potentially inflict more damage on themselves than on the president if they came at him too strongly. Haynes Johnson of the Washington Post wrote “nor is there any thirst for blood evident on the two panels. The two chairmen, Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) and Rep. Lee H. Hamilton (D-Ind.), have said repeatedly that they want the hearings to be as bipartisan and judicious as possible. And they have said they seek an educational, fact-finding process, not a trial of the

president.” Because of this attitude, it is possible the Congressional committees did not dig as deep as they could have. A telling sign of the softness of the Congressional investigations was their attitudes toward Oliver North, arguably the guiltiest of all those involved in the scandal. Instead of prosecuting him, many members of the committee spent their time praising his military accomplishments. For example Gerald B.H. Solomon (R- NY) stated “you are truly a great American, Colonel, and we back home deeply admire and respect your past history and what you’ve done for your country.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:112) Both parties in Congress expressed a desire to move on from the scandal. Busby explains “Democrats [sought to address] the problematic issue of the federal deficit, while Republican attention concentrated on the weighty ramifications of Robert H. Bork’s nomination to the Supreme Court.” (1999:170)

Also unlike the highly bipartisanship of Nixon’s House Judiciary Committee, partisan bickering plagued the Iran-Contra hearings. Without a bipartisan desire to convict the president, Ronald Reagan was safe from a full-fledged Congressional attack. In addition, he “ was not subject to widespread bipartisan attacks for he had some Republican defenders on the committees, a fact which helped to act as a counterweight to Democratic attacks, few as they were.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:169) Importantly, the Democratic majority was unable to use its numerical advantage to attack the Republican president. Oliver North’s testimony split the party as some Democrats jumped ship and joined the Republicans in congratulating North rather than admonishing him. Most telling of this partisan split is the minority report issued by the Republican members of the panel which stated: “the bottom line however, is that the mistakes of the Iran-Contra Affair were just that – mistakes in judgment, and nothing more. There was no constitutional crisis, no systematic disrespect for ‘the rule of law’ ,

no grand conspiracy, and no Administration-wide dishonesty or cover-up.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:173) Finally, the president was saved in part by Congress’s inability to uncover hard evidence that would directly implicate him. Their investigations therefore focused on his subordinates and he was never brought to trial. There was no “smoking gun” in Iran-Contra, possibly because it had been destroyed in North’s shredding frenzy or possibly because one didn’t exist. It was never determined.

The final stage of the Lewinsky investigations was for the articles of impeachment approved by the House Judiciary Committee to go to the full House for a vote. If the House adopted any of these resolutions, they would be sent to the Senate who would then vote to on whether or not to remove Clinton from office. Congress was in a position to effectively end Clinton’s presidency and cement his place in infamy, but extreme partisanship and public backlash created a situation in which the president survived while the legislature floundered. As talk of impeachment abounded at the end of 1998, Congress solidified along party lines and unprecedented partisanship emerged between Democrats and Republicans. Conservative Republicans spearheaded the drive for impeachment, led by a deep-seated disapproval of Clinton. In the House, “although members spoke, almost reverently at times, of their constitutional duty and the solemnity of the occasion, political partisanship drove the proceedings, propelled by conservative Republicans who deeply disapproved of and mistrusted the president and seemed resolute on overturning the will of the electorate.” (House Votes to Impeach President Clinton 1999:958)

This was not lost on the public who saw the partisan bickering and condemned it. Busby found that “public opinion polls had identified a popular belief that the impeachment process was beset by partisanship and had degenerated into a political witchhunt.” (1999:155) This

disapproval of Congress was amplified by the public's extremely negative reaction to the release of the Starr Report, a move that had ultimately been decided by Congress. Even without the aspect of public opinion, the most important consequence of this partisanship was that it made it impossible for Congress to remove Clinton from office, therefore saving him from the fate of a president who had been forced out of office. The damage that the GOP did to itself by pushing for impeachment became starkly clear in the 1998 midterm elections where Democrats made a net gain of five seats. This was even more remarkable given the fact that "no president's party had actually gained seats in the second midterm election of a presidential term since the 1820s." (Rae & Campbell 2004:90) The backlash against Congress again characterized a situation in which the citizenry disapproved of Clinton's enemies and therefore shifted support in his favor. As impeachment approached his job approval ratings soared to 72%, an incredible feat for a president who had lied about having an illicit affair (Busby, "Defending the American Presidency" 2001:208). Despite this, the Republican led Congress pushed on and the House approved two articles of impeachment for obstruction of justice and perjury. Unsurprisingly, when the Senate trial began, Democrats stuck to the party line and voted unanimously against the articles, therefore saving Clinton from removal from office.

When each of the final investigations met to decide the legal fate of the president, they had the potential to ruin any chance he had of survival. However, two things had to happen to make this the case. First of all, they had to find him guilty and conclude that he was responsible for any illegal activity. Second, they had to have the support of the public who would uphold their decision. The House Judiciary Committee found Nixon guilty enough to approve three articles of impeachment and send them to the House. It is almost inevitable that he would have been impeached and removed from office if he did not resign first. The public stood behind the

committee, pleased with its bipartisanship and wholly convinced of Nixon's guilt after the release of the tapes. The Iran-Contra Congressional hearings were beset by partisan bickering, a reluctance to attack Reagan, and an inability to uncover hard evidence. Reagan was therefore never declared legally guilty. When Congress debated Clinton's impeachment much of the public had already decided on his innocence. It showed strong disapproval of Congressional actions and attacks on the president. As a result, even though the partisan situation allowed for House Republicans to push through two articles of impeachment, it never gained the support of the public, which allowed Clinton to hold on to his popularity.

The Media

As the intermediary between the president, the White House, Congress and the public, the media controls the flow of information and the tone of reports. In regard to a scandal it could put a negative spin on the president's statements, express disapproval of Congressional actions, or write its own opinion of the president's guilt. All of this could influence how the public responded to the scandal. However, the public generally regards the national media as a single entity, allowing people to form an opinion of it, positive or negative. Similar to the situation with the investigative bodies, if the public had a more negative perception of the media, it inadvertently helped the president.

Reporting Style

How the national media chose to cover the scandals largely dictated the public's response to them. Not only were people given specific content that could impact their opinion of the president, but the reporting style also impacted public perception of the scandal. In Watergate, it faced continuous, everyday reporting. In Contrast, the media in Iran-Contra displayed a strong reluctance to attack Reagan. Finally, during the Lewinsky scandal the media resorted to rumors

and gossip in many of its reports.

With a notoriously bad relationship to begin with, Nixon and the media virtually went to war as the scandal progressed. Compounding the fact that revelations in the case kept coming on their own, the nonstop reporting of each development made Watergate the big news story of the year, despite the end of the Vietnam War. The rate with which this happened especially picked up after the indictment of the burglars and as the Ervin Committee began to gather evidence. At this point, the public received saturation coverage, with both the prominence and continuity of coverage increasing. Lang explains that “prominence gives a news item the visibility that facilitates one’s attention. Continuity allows for the kind of reiteration and development of news angles that help to fix the basic elements of a story in one’s mind.” (1983:49) The breaking news surrounding the “Saturday Night Massacre,” the publishing of paraphrased tape transcripts in newspapers, the reenactment of the tape transcripts on the major television networks, and the live and constant coverage of the House Judiciary Committee’s hearings are all examples of the way the media kept Watergate at the forefront of people’s minds. Watergate became so present in everyday life that by April of 1973 – a full month before the televised hearings of the Ervin Committee – an overwhelming 91% of people responded “yes” when asked “Have You Heard or Read About Watergate?” (Gallup Poll, Apr, 1973)

Whereas during Watergate the media focused intently on Nixon’s wrongdoing, a strong reluctance to attack Reagan characterized coverage of Iran-Contra. Similar to Congress, the media did not relish the thought of targeting a popular president who had much of the support of the public. Of course, as the scandal first made news and Reagan’s innocence came under question, the press was not hesitant to go after the president. Especially in the first year, “media reports continually highlighted the key events of the scandal – as defined by the press corps and

television networks – paying particular attention to Reagan’s involvement and a number of inconsistencies in the evidence offered during testimony. The term ‘credibility gap’ once again rose to prominence.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:155) However, as time went on, Reagan’s guilt seemed less likely, and the people stood by the president, the press began to back off. In a 1987 Chicago Tribune article, David Broder explained “many want to know why the media are zapping a popular President with daily doses of disturbing information.” (1987:33) Furthermore, the details of the scandal were never truly exposed so even if the press had an inclination to attack Reagan, they simply could not. The same article explains, “no one gives us [the media] the whole picture, so we fill in a few gaps each day, necessarily repeating or revising what we have reported previously.” (Broder 1987:23) As a result, Reagan was to a great extent insulated from a negative press.

During Watergate and Iran-Contra the majority of media reports were substantiated by credible sources. In contrast, a prevalence of rumors, leaks, false information, and unsubstantiated sources characterized the reporting in the Lewinsky scandal. When the scandal broke, the amount of attention it garnered led to an effort on the part of the media to report any information immediately. Journalists began to take whatever material they had, regardless of where it came from, and punish it without corroboration. Former director of the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy and thirty year veteran of broadcast journalism Marvin Kalb explains that “suddenly, all of journalism resembled an unchecked and uncheckable maelstrom of facts and hearsay, rumor and buzz that ricocheted from Drudge’s Internet into the newsrooms of the Los Angeles Times and ABC News, from Limbaugh to Koppel.” (2001:126) Journalists broke every rule in the book during the Lewinsky scandal, leaving the public to grapple with both truths and lies. In order to avoid adequately sourcing its reports one of the

media's most popular techniques was to report on already existing stories. When new information emerged, regardless of its reliability, news programs would "slip around direct coverage of a scandal by reporting on how the press covered it – in this oblique and sophisticated way, covering the scandal by focusing on the coverage of the scandal." (Kalb 2001:186) As a result, false stories built on one another and spiraled out of control. One example is when a Dallas based journalist reported that Clinton and Lewinsky had been spotted out together, an obviously false story. He was forced to retract, bringing embarrassment down on himself and his newspaper (Kalb 2001:244).

Although this new trend in journalism could have severely harmed Clinton, in the end it helped him. First of all the questionable reporting tactics led to a lot of media infighting. Some journalists, especially from the older generation, felt that the serious journalism was slipping into the tabloid range. For example, Dan Rather asserted "I didn't get into journalism to chase sex stories. One reason I hate it is that I think this story's bad for the country. I don't think anybody comes out looking good, and very few people feel good about it." (Busby, "Defending the American Presidency" 2001:172) Because the media was at times fighting with itself, it could not launch a consolidated attack against the president.

More importantly, as a result of this reporting style people began to lose confidence with the national media. It was nearly impossible to decide what to believe and citizens lost their ability to trust journalists and news correspondents. After the scandal had pretty much wrapped up in 1999, respondents of a poll were asked "(I'm going to read you a list of words that could be used to describe news media coverage of the (Bill) Clinton/(Monica) Lewinsky story. For each one, please tell me whether you would use it to describe news media coverage of the story.)... Irresponsible--please tell me whether you would use it to describe news media coverage of the

story.” More than two-thirds of people (64%) responded “yes”. (Fairness Of Clinton-Lewinsky News Coverage Survey, Mar, 1999) With doubt embedded in their mind, Clinton’s claims of innocence became plausible and started to take root. One of the most respected papers in the country, the Washington Post, was subjected to this fate as “so many stories were published with apparently inadequate sourcing that readers came to the conclusion that the paper must have been protecting or covering up for somebody.” (Kalb 2001:272)

The style of reporting by the media in each scandal determined much of the public response. Continuous reporting of Watergate satisfied an already hungry public’s desire for information and also kept the scandal alive for a significant amount of time. Reluctance to attack Reagan fell in line with a public who supported the president, which protected him from noteworthy media antagonism. Finally, shady reporting tactics during the Lewinsky scandal turned the public against the media so that its negative reports found no bearing with the people.

Level of Interest

Like any other news story, the level of public interest waxed and waned in all three scandals. Rather than something that the media controlled, this was defined by the public based on their support for the president and their concern about the illegality of his actions. The rising prevalence of television kept Watergate constantly in the minds of Americans who could witness events live as they took place. During Iran-Contra there was comparably very little interest in the proceedings. Throughout the Lewinsky scandal the public consciously turned attention away from the media as a backlash against perceived rumormongering and unnecessary attacks on the president.

Even in the beginning, albeit with the Washington Post leading newspaper coverage, television brought Watergate into the public’s living rooms. On the three major networks

“Watergate, in terms of airtime, compared favorably with Vietnam, the Paris peace talks, and the election campaign.” (Olson 2003:65) Television coverage took on all new importance in October 1973 with the “Saturday Night Massacre”. Perhaps Nixon and his staff had thought that firing Cox late on a Saturday night during a holiday weekend would dissipate any strong public response. This proved to be a major mistake as “TV was crackling with bulletins and instant specials were preempting the Saturday night schedules. If [Chief of Staff Alexander M.] Haig had deliberately tried to stage something looking like a coup for the cameras, he could hardly have done it better.” (Emery 1994:400) In fact, even on a football Sunday the next day, special breaking bulletins continuously interrupted the game to satiate the public’s furious demand for information. Congress and the White House were bombarded by an unprecedented number of telephone calls, letters, and telegrams, all expressing disgust with the administration (Lang 1983:103). Of course, Nixon tried to abate the pressure with the release of the transcripts, again not bargaining on the response of television networks. The lengthy transcripts were packaged for a TV audience, highlighting the most shameful parts. Some networks even had actors read them like a script, breathing new life into the endless pages (Lang 1983:124). Without television coverage, the “Saturday Night Massacre,” a monumental event in Nixon’s downfall, may have been buried within the holiday weekend.

Finally, television coverage became extremely important near the end of the scandal with coverage of the House Judiciary Committee’s impeachment hearings. With the big three networks continuously rotating coverage, the public saw the Committee at work and most were more than satisfied. With the Committee focusing on the evidence, people saw firsthand “a group of 38 Representatives, each of whom had an enormous command of the facts of the case. For the first time, the country was to be made aware in a systematic manner of the case against Richard

Nixon, and in less than a week the Committee made that case an overwhelming one.”

(Mankiewicz 1975:234) Not only did the House Judiciary Committee find enough evidence to bring three damning articles of impeachment to the full House, it also convinced the public of the legitimacy of this action, eroding away almost all support Nixon had managed to hang on to.

Quite unlike the situation Nixon faced during Watergate, the public became much more distracted by other events during the Iran-Contra scandal. In any event the press and the public form a cycle where each reinforces the other. Because of more interest from the public in events other than Reagan’s culpability, the press reported less on it, and therefore the public heard less about it. One reason for this phenomenon was that unlike the continuous bombshell revelations of the Watergate hearings, those of Iran-Contra were just boring. Howard Rosenberg of the LA Times wrote, “the platitudinous opening statements by investigating committee members were as repetitive as TV itself. It was like hearing 26 Jack Valentis on Oscar night.” (1987:1) Due the dearth of exciting scandal at the hearings, the public refocused its attention on something more shocking, the alleged affair of leading Democratic presidential candidate Gary Hart. Rosenberg explains “the question of what President Reagan knew and when he knew it seems to have been temporarily eclipsed by the question of what Hart did and when he did it. No doubt most of America is far more compelled by the juicy sexual innuendos swirling around Hart than by the Iran-contra hearings.” (1987:1)

Furthermore, when the press did report on the scandal it aided Reagan rather than hurt him. When Lawrence Walsh released his report, he pointed to many wrongdoings in Reagan’s administration, but the press focused more on Walsh himself than the contents of the report. The day after he released it “the New York Times ran a front-page news analysis headed THE SCANDAL THAT FELL FLAT. [The author concluded that the issues] were ‘basically lost on

the American public,' and key culprits emerged from the hearings 'as patriots.'" (Byrne & Kornbluh 1994:44) Furthermore, similar to the situation in Congress, Walsh was criticized more than Reagan. Even though Walsh's report condemned Reagan's actions, former Watergate investigator and Washington Post reporter Scott Armstrong noted that "the drift in this town now...is that Walsh took too long, spent too much money, and that it wasn't worth it." (Byrne & Kornbluh 1994:44)

After it began using questionable reporting tactics in the Lewinsky scandal, the majority of the national media – including television, newspapers, and the Internet – faced an extreme backlash from the public. People had not only lost their confidence in its ability to report neutrally, but they also began to form an exceptionally negative perception of the press due to the content of many of the stories. Mainstream press had begun to sink down to the level of the tabloids, and people began to lash out against the gossipy nature of the reports. For example, stories spoke about the relationship as if it were a soap opera and reported alleged sightings of the couple. Moreover, the focus on sex caused many to turn away in disgust. Those who believed that Clinton was not legally culpable saw his sex life as a private matter that did not belong on the evening news or on the front pages of newspapers. As a result, many viewers and readers started to not make distinctions between real news and entertainment. Harris explains that "after the immediate shock of the January disclosures, much of the public had placed the drama in a middle zone between politics and entertainment. Latenight viewers could get their fill of the story on either *Nightline* or the *Tonight Show*." (2005:336)

Consequently, the mainstream media lost a lot of credibility and public confidence, which clearly helped to serve Clinton's interests. Although the media was often against him, the public was against the media, which in a strange way sent support his way. Denton and Holloway

explain “some may have supported Clinton not so much because they ‘approved’ of him but because they *disapproved* of the whole spectacle of scandal created by the media ‘feeding frenzy.’” (2003:273) Even after a mere month of this kind of reporting the public backlash was palpable. A poll taken in February 1998 asked respondents “(Do you approve or disapprove of the way each of the following has handled the controversy over (Bill) Clinton and Monica Lewinsky?) How about...the news media?” An overwhelming 73% answered that they disapproved (Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, Feb, 1998).

Even though the level of interest was not something that the media could directly control, it still impacted presidential recovery. People were glued to their TV sets during the Watergate hearings reflecting a widespread conviction of Nixon’s guilt and a recognition of the severity of the allegations. Because the interest was so high, every new revelation, big or small, was met with a public hungry for information. In contrast, the public was bored by the Iran-Contra hearings. Consequently, any potentially damaging information was largely ignored and quickly forgotten. Finally, in response to the media’s attempts to create juicy news stories, the public turned away and supported Clinton despite the knowledge of a sexual affair.

Other Media Factors

Other than reporting style and level of interest there were other various media factors that affected the survival of each president. In Watergate the Washington Post played a vital role in breaking the story and keeping it alive. Most importantly, it was the first to “make a connection between the burglary and the White House; the first to show that Nixon campaign funds were involved;...the first to trace the Watergate affair to the very doors of the President’s Oval Office – to his White House chief of staff, H.R. Haldeman.” (Lang 1983:27) After the break in Nixon repeatedly assured the public of an absence of a connection between the White House and the

burglars. Regardless, young reporters Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein still had suspicions concerning McCord's position in CREEP and where the money for the operation had come from. They soon received help from the infamous anonymous source, Deep Throat, who confirmed their doubts and led to an explosive investigation. They asserted that CREEP funds had financed Watergate, which sparked an investigation by the General Accounting Office into Nixon's campaign funds, which then threatened to blow the entire cover up (Olson 2003:61-66). Throughout the scandal, Woodward and Bernstein remained at the forefront of reporting, and later won a Pulitzer Prize for their work. Despite Nixon's attempts (including those that were successful before the election) to keep Watergate out of the news, the Washington Post continued to keep the story alive until it was picked up by virtually every other news source in the country. The Post thus "started a slow but steady diet of story after story, revelation after revelation, until the cover-up came unraveled, and the corruption of the Nixon administration was finally exposed." (Genovese 1999:111) It is possible that without the initial investigating and reports from the Post that Watergate coverage would not have reached the proportion that it did.

One media factor that aided in Reagan's recovery was his penchant for openness and frequent press conferences. Unlike Nixon who had a notoriously bad relationship with the press and retreated into the White House for much of Watergate, Reagan took control and in the end overcame a potentially hostile media situation. Reagan made media relations a priority and held several conferences "designed both to appease press demands for openness and to improve presidential-press relations at a difficult time." (Busby, "Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair" 1999:134) He made his own addresses and answered questions asked of him, all the time maintaining his innocence. Realizing the success of this strategy, director of communications

Thomas S. Griscom said “I think the net effect at this point is that you have an attitude within the press corps that the President is accessible, that he is willing to deal with the problems at hand and he really wants to get his story out.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:134) By not retreating from the press, Reagan appeased their demand for information but still remained in control of the situation. As a result, “with the Great Communicator at its head, the White House mounted the most effective public relations operation in its history.” (Pemberton 1997:205) This not only appealed to the public but also helped to uphold a mutually beneficial relationship with the press.

Finally, one factor that had the potential to seriously harm Clinton was the rise of the Internet. Quite unlike the Watergate and Iran-Contra scandals, the Lewinsky scandal occurred in the age of technological revolution. The Internet, although not a major news source yet, was quickly becoming present in the daily lives of Americans who by the late 1990s had unprecedented access to it. With the Internet came instant access to information, oftentimes unfiltered and unregulated. The fact that news of the affair was first leaked on online news site The Drudge Report says a lot about the power of the Internet during the scandal. Drudge took snippets of information from various sources, put them together with a blaring headline, and shipped it out to the masses. On January 18 his site bore the words “NEWSWEEK KILLS STORY ON WHITE HOUSE INTERN BLOCKBUSTER REPORT: 23 – YEAR – OLD, FORMER WHITE HOUSE INTERN SEX RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT.” (Kalb 2001:81) One of the major problems for Clinton was that the Internet was much more difficult to check and control than traditional news sources. Anyone could post anything, which “represented a new and unavoidable challenge of a sort no White House spokesman had ever confronted before.” (Kalb 2001:109)

Moreover, the release of information on the Internet was instantaneous, which meant that Clinton had to either make his statement before the release of information, and therefore anticipate what information would emerge, or he had to contend with the fact that citizens had been exposed to the information and probably had already formed their own judgments. This became evident with the release of the Starr Report. Within hours of its release, people had read the entire report firsthand. In contrast, if it had been merely printed in newspapers or reported on TV citizens would have likely only been exposed to excerpts. Unlike the uncontrollable nature of much of Internet reporting that hurt Clinton, the release of the Starr report in this manner may actually have helped him. First of all, people became very upset that this type of explicit material was available to almost everyone, including children. Rep. James P. Moran (D-VA), who had voted against disclosing the report on the Internet, asked “what in the heck are we doing, making this kind of near-pornographic material available on the Internet with the imprimatur of the U.S. Congress?” (Starr Report 1998:xi) In addition, people were so inundated with news of the scandal that they started to become somewhat numb to it. So much shocking material had reached them that not much seemed scandalous anymore.

Despite these few small victories for Clinton, a much more troubling problem emerged with regard to Internet news. As previously mentioned, news in this form was unchecked and unregulated. This led to rampant rumors and unsubstantiated claims. Marvin Kalb explains Internet journalism as “an ‘Open Sesame’ to a world of speeding and colliding fragments of unchecked data fired into cyberspace without any assurance of accuracy or reliability.” (2001:97) Unfortunately for Clinton, this meant that any one of his enemies could claim - anonymously if they so chose – almost anything and pass it off as truth. In addition, people did not necessarily have to worry about the same legal ramifications on the Internet. Nick Denton of the Financial

Times explained “the key distinguishing feature of the internet is that it is new, unformed, and seems to exist in a kind of legal no man's land. Individuals spread rumours on internet newsgroups that would, if published in a pamphlet, often land them in court.” (1998:6) Because of this, Clinton could not seek legal recourse even though much of the information published was untrue. While Clinton’s White House had to deal with this unprecedented phenomenon, the public backlash against the nature of the content published on the Internet helped protect him from unrestrained attacks.

The External Context

In terms of scandal recovery, the final factor to consider is the environment at large. Nothing occurs in a vacuum and the public is always influenced by real life events. It is not far fetched to assume that people who are content with the world around them would be more receptive to presidential recovery. The economy, domestic and foreign concerns, partisan situation, comprehensibility of each event, and cumulative effect of the scandals all influenced the ability of Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton to bounce back from scandal.

Economy

The economy is one of the largest, if not the largest, external force that influences the willingness of people to excuse otherwise intolerable behavior. People have a remarkable ability to forgive or overlook indiscretions when their wallets are thick and plates are full. William Neikirk of the Chicago Tribune asserted that “you can bend the law, misrepresent facts, even lie in this country, and people will still give you the benefit of the doubt if you as President preside over a healthy economy.” (Neikirk 1987:F1) Both Reagan and Clinton held office during remarkably good economic times while Nixon’s terms were characterized by economic unsteadiness.

Unfortunately for Nixon, he lied and misrepresented facts at a time of economic instability. In October, 1973, coinciding with the “Saturday Night Massacre,” Arab armies attacked Israel, who then received aid from the United States. In retaliation, Arab oil companies began an embargo, which subsequently “led to a sudden increase in the price of oil and sent much of the Western world into recession. The stock market, already weak before the Middle East war broke out, entered the worst bear market since the Depression.” (Norris 1998:A18)

Already unhappy with Nixon’s handling of Watergate, the public further turned on the administration when they began to feel these effects on their own wallets. Between October 26-29, 1973 a sample of national adults was asked “How would you rate President Nixon on...Keeping economy healthy--excellent, pretty good, only fair, or poor?” Predictably, 78% gave him a negative (only fair or poor) rating (Harris Survey, Oct. 1973).

Adding to the oil crisis, Nixon’s economic woes increased with a period of high inflation. Despite high employment rates and a relatively stable economy in 1969, Nixon inherited an unfavorable inflation rate of 6%. In an attempt to lower it, he imposed moderately successful wage and price controls. Amidst the scandal in 1973, the administration set forth a plan of voluntary controls, which led to a major increase in prices despite the threat of a return to mandatory controls. By June 1973 inflation had again soared to 9% measured by the Consumer Price Index (Dale). As a result, some who had still held out in support of Nixon saw “their incomes eroded by high inflation, [and] then decided Nixon wasn't worth saving.” (Neikirk 1987:F1)

Finally, the public saw that Nixon was at least partially responsible for the state of the economy. In 1971 he took the United States off the gold standard. With nothing tying down the value of a dollar, inflation soon soared and long-term price stability was forfeited. For example

the “average annual inflation rate [was] 0.1 percent between 1880 and 1914 [but rose to an] average of 4.1 percent between 1946 and 2003.” (Bordo 2008) Indicative of the mood surrounding the economy under Nixon is the March 13, 1972 Time Magazine cover of Uncle Sam with turned out empty pockets and the question “Is the U.S. Going Broke?”

When Iran-Contra broke the economic situation of the United States was thriving. In 1981 Reagan had instated a new policy aimed at economic recovery which would “(1) reduce the growth of government spending, (2) reduce the marginal tax rates on income from both labor and capital, (3) reduce regulation, and (4) reduce inflation by controlling the growth of the money supply.” (Niskanen 2002) William A. Niskanen, chairman of the Cato Institute, asserts that these policies overall were successful citing the fact that “the unemployment rate declined from 7.0 percent in 1980 to 5.4 percent in 1988. The inflation rate declined from 10.4 percent in 1980 to 4.2 percent in 1988.” With a GDP of \$4,427,700,000,000.00 in 1986 (nationmaster.com) it is clear that the U.S. was prospering during Reagan’s presidency.

Unlike the oil situation during Watergate where the price per barrel was \$41, it fell to nearly half that (\$21) at the time of Iran-Contra (wtrg.com). The price of oil is generally indicative of the economy, and more importantly the mood of the public in relation to it. Because it is a resource used daily all over the country, when it is low, people are happy, when it is high, people are not. Therefore, as part of his recovery, Reagan could point to the strong economy as one reason that the public should continue to support him.

Like Reagan, Clinton presided over a remarkable economy throughout most of his presidency and the Lewinsky era was no exception. In the President’s Annual Economic Report, Clinton claimed that “the economy has created more than 14 million new jobs, unemployment is at its lowest level in 24 years, and core inflation is at its lowest level in 30 years....Poverty is

dropping and median family income has gone up nearly \$2,200 since 1993.” (President's Economic Report, Economic Advisers' Report 1999:77) In terms of real effects on the average American they were enjoying “slightly higher incomes, lower mortgage payments, considerably higher values for their mutual funds and retirement savings, greater job security, and more buying power.” (Sonner & Wilcox 1999:556) People could see tangible results from Clinton's economic plan and were much less willing to turn their backs on a president who had improved their daily life. The most remarkable result of Clinton's economic plan was his balanced budget, a feat not seen in the prior thirty years and not since then.

In terms of the Lewinsky situation, the most important impact that the good economy had was that many people felt Clinton was responsible for it. In January 1998 a poll asked “(As you know, the deficit has been cut by over 260 billion dollars since 1992, and some economists say it may be balanced as early as this year. Please say whether you think each of the following deserves, or does not deserve substantial credit for this reduction in the deficit.)...President (Bill) Clinton.” A near supermajority of 63% responded that yes, they felt Clinton deserved the credit (Gallup Poll, Jan, 1998) Moreover, he had promised to use the budget surplus in ways that pleased both conservative and liberal voters in order to create a very wide base of support. In his 1999 State of the Union, which coincidentally fell during the impeachment period, Clinton promised to use the money to “sav[e] Social Security and Medicare. His education program combined an end to social promotion and the provision of report cards for schools with plans to hire more teachers and reduce class sizes. He challenged Congress to boost the minimum wage, expand child-care tax credits, and extend the Family and Medical Leave Act.” (Sonner & Wilcox 1999:556) It is unlikely that the economy was the sole factor that saved Clinton, but it certainly helped turned the public in his favor.

The economy was important for two reasons in terms of scandal recovery. One, a good economy endeared the public to the president and made it easier to turn a blind eye to scandalous activity. Two, it allowed the president to point to something substantial and important and claim it as a reason to support him. A good economy gives the president an advantage going into a scandal that could help negate the damaging information that would come out. Nixon could not tap into this because of the poor economic situation during his presidency, but both Reagan and Clinton had the benefit of a strong economy on their side. Closely linked to the strength of the economy is the impact of global events, which will be explored next.

Foreign and Domestic Concerns

Next to the economy, perhaps the second most important environmental concern is unrest, war, and general prosperity. If the president holds office during a relatively calm period where people feel safe and content, he is likely to have more support of the public. In addition, during wartime the public will “rally around the flag” and the national government, but only if the war is popular and there is a consensus that it is worth fighting, such as during World War II. Also, if domestic unrest erupts it can still help the president if it is unpopular and he comes down with a strong hand to stop it. Not only do these situations improve presidential popularity, they can also be used as an explicit tool, like a favorable economy, in scandal recovery as something that the president can point to as proof of his success in office. Watergate coincided with the incredibly unpopular Vietnam War, albeit the end of the conflict, as well as domestic unrest in the form of the student movement. Iran-Contra occurred at an extremely favorable time for Reagan as the Cold War wound down and the Soviet Union imploded soon after. Finally, the Lewinsky Scandal took place during a time of peace and prosperity not seen in nearly half a century.

Admittedly, Nixon did not inherit easy circumstances in his first term as president. The war in Vietnam continued to rage on, inciting an already unhappy public. Although he publicly stated a commitment to end the war, and did drastically reduce the level of ground troops, Nixon embarked on an extensive bombing campaign of Cambodia. With no congressional oversight, and no public knowledge, he engaged in a presidential war while publicly maintaining the face of the peace candidate. This proved a huge mistake and became a major controversy in Nixon's presidency. As news of the invasion leaked out, "the campuses immediately erupted. Nixon's comment about 'bums blowing up campuses' was published and further fired up the already outraged protestors. Four hundred forty-eight colleges declared themselves 'on strike.' Many rioted. Police had to protect the White House from over 100,000 protestors who converged on Washington." (Genovese 1999:7) Young people took to the streets in vigorous protest and the counterculture blossomed throughout the nation to advocated by a generation who felt a deep distrust towards both the police and the military.

This tension culminated in May 1970 when national guardsmen opened fire on students at Kent State University, killing four and wounding nine in an incident that shook the entire country. Less than two weeks later, two more students were killed at Jackson State. If Nixon could have ignored the protests before, he could not overlook the outrage that permeated through to the White House. He "felt threatened by the protestors, and would not, could not, sit idly by while the protestors dragged him down as they had done to his predecessor. Nixon was determined not to be their victim. He would act." (Genovese 1999:9) This attitude led the slippery slope of illegal and immoral activities, which ultimately culminated in Watergate.

Despite the fierce domestic unrest he faced, it must be noted that Nixon did have relative success in foreign relations. He entered into a period of *détente* with the Soviet Union, in which

the strained relationship between the two superpowers began to ease. In addition, he was the first U.S. president to visit communist China and reopen relations in 1972, which was widely considered a diplomatic breakthrough. Regardless of his success abroad, Nixon's reputation could never remain untarnished after potent protesting that characterized much of his domestic situation.

Clearly, the winding down of the Cold War helped Reagan in ways that Nixon could only wish Vietnam had for him. For forty years the United States was plagued by a menace across the world. Citizens felt the real and constant threat of nuclear attack especially at times such as the Cuban Missile Crisis. The American military had been used to control communism in Korea and Vietnam with great loss of life and resources. Vietnam had especially scarred the American psyche and it was well known that the public would not tolerate another major military intervention. Jaded by these events, the American public was instilled with a sense of hope and optimism when hard-liner Reagan took office and vowed to put an end to the Cold War. Calling the Soviet Union an "evil empire", he took the United States off of the policy of détente and began to actively pursue a new policy that would bring the USSR to the negotiating table. Most telling of Reagan's attitude towards the Cold War was his speech in front of Berlin Wall: "General Secretary Gorbachev, if you seek peace, if you seek prosperity for the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, if you seek liberalization, come here to this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, open this gate! Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." (Abshire 2005:160)

Two examples of Reagan's accomplishments in the cold war are the Geneva Summit that took place in November 1985 and the Reykjavik Summit on October 1986, just one month before the scandal broke. Geneva was a major turning point in the Cold War as it was the first time the two leaders would meet in six years. In their first meeting, Reagan and Gorbachev spoke

for over an hour and then took another hour-long private walk. Although both pushed for their own positions, there was a definite air of friendliness and willingness to negotiate. Overall, Geneva was major step in diffusing Cold War tension as both leaders “agreed to Reagan’s proposals to reduce 50 percent of their large, strategic offensive nuclear arms and to eventually eliminate the intermediate-range missiles aimed at countries in Europe.” (Anderson 2009:265)

Nearly one year later the leaders again met in Reykjavik, Iceland to discuss disarmament and missile reduction. This summit did not go as well as the first because Reagan was unwilling to back down and eliminate his Strategic Defense Initiative (or Star Wars). Although no definitive agreements were made, Gorbachev and Reagan had made each other aware that they both were willing to make certain concessions and both wanted an end to the threat of nuclear weapons. Finally, in February 1987, smack in the middle of the Iran-Contra scandal, Gorbachev conceded “that Moscow was now ready to conclude a separate agreement with the U.S. on medium-range missiles in Europe...’we are putting our proposals on the table of negotiations with the U.S. in Geneva.’” (Anderson 2009:336) This was major breakthrough in the Cold War and a turning point that signaled its close end.

These policies, combined with factors outside of U.S. control such as a failing Soviet economy and the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, brought U.S.-USSR relations to a point that had not been achieved since the start of the Cold War. Finally, after years of conflict, the end was in sight and the people of the United States could not have been more pleased. In this political climate and with the successes that Reagan had achieved, it is not difficult to see how the public was able to move past the Iran-Contra scandal and forgive the president.

Unlike Nixon and Reagan, Clinton presided over a time of peace that the American people had not experienced in generations. In 1991, a year before he took office, the Soviet

Union officially dissolved, effectively ending the Cold War that had plagued American politics for four decades and drained military and defense spending. Not only did this temporarily end the threat of nuclear world war, it also established the United States as the sole world superpower. In addition, the harsh memories of Vietnam and Korea were for the most part left behind as a new generation matured into adults. This was the first time in half a century that the lives of American citizens were not colored by distant war – hot or cold. Although Clinton was not responsible for this phenomenon, it certainly did not hurt him. Like the situation with the economy, when people do not feel threatened or are not involved in an unpopular war, they have a more favorable view of the government.

In addition, although Clinton was not known for a remarkable foreign policy, his was one that garnered a lot of approval. He recognized that the world was changing and saw the trend of globalization as something that could benefit the United States. He “sought to accelerate and harness these forces [of globalization] and mitigate their volatility. He led intense efforts to lower trade and investment barriers-completing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with Canada and Mexico, concluding the Uruguay Round of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), supporting the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), and urging Congress to pass the African Growth and Opportunity Act.” (Clinton’s Foreign Policy 2000:19) Clinton also did not let the impeachment process convince anyone – at home or abroad – that his presidency was weakened. On December 16, 1998 the United States along with Great Britain bombed Iraq. Clinton released a statement where he said “Saddam Hussein and the other enemies of peace may have thought that the serious debate currently before the House of Representatives would distract Americans or weaken our resolve to face him down...But once more, the United States has proven that...when we must act in America’s vital interests, we will

do so.” (Busby, “Defending the American Presidency” 2001:152) Clinton was again asserting America’s dominance in the world, despite any issues he faced at home.

Along with the economy, the larger foreign and domestic context that the presidents operated under impacted the public’s response to the scandals. It mattered less whether the country was at war, as shown by the fact the Cold War had not officially ended when Iran-Contra occurred, and more whether or not people supported the president’s policies concerning foreign and domestic affairs. Although Nixon gained some support for his foreign policy and the end of the war in Vietnam, he shot himself in the foot by engaging in a secret bombing campaign against Cambodia, which sparked a vast student movement. Reagan’s overwhelming success in bringing the Soviet Union to the negotiating table and the fortunate timing of the end of the Cold War helped sway public opinion even more in his favor. Finally, the virtual absence of any conflict during Clinton’s presidency and his small, but successful foreign policy contributed to the overall happiness of the nation and therefore the greater willingness to forgive.

The Partisan Situation

The partisan situation impacted the chance of recovery in each of these instances because the president’s party never held the majority in Congress. Each had to therefore contend with a generally hostile majority who took the scandals as opportunities to launch further attacks. The degree of antagonism from the opposition and the reactions of the minority party determined how the partisan situation would affect the presidents’ chances for recovery.

By late 1974, Nixon could not have faced a more different political situation compared to the 1972 election. In a landslide, he won 96.7% of the electoral vote only missing Massachusetts (uselectionatlas.org). Even as the scandal began to unfold, Nixon held on to moderate Republican support, which he worked to maintain in his strategy of impeachment politics. It is

unsurprising that as the facts came out, Democrats seized the opportunity to criticize Nixon and his administration, but the final blow came with the complete loss of Republican support. After the Saturday Night Massacre, Time Magazine published its first ever editorial titled “The President Should Resign.” Time had endorsed Nixon three times, but still concluded that Nixon’s actions left no other choice. Thus, the editorial confirmed “that Nixon had lost mainstream Republican support, and it gave legitimacy to calls for the president to resign.” (Olson 2003:123) Republican support only further eroded from this point on. When the time came for the House Judiciary Committee to vote on articles of impeachment, the loss of Republican support had completely solidified. Three articles were passed, and after the release of the “smoking gun” tape, every single member, including all seventeen Republicans, announced their intent to vote for impeachment. Moreover, House Republican leader John J. Rhodes and Senate Republican whip Robert P. Griffin stated their support of impeachment (Olson 2003:163). Devastatingly aware that he had lost virtually all Republican support, and would almost surely be impeached, Nixon chose to resign and end his presidency under the shame of scandal.

While Reagan for the most part maintained the support of his party, in the beginning it seemed on the surface that he faced virulent attacks from the Democratic majority. When Congress released its report on Iran-Contra the majority opinion placed the blame squarely on the shoulders of the president stating that the “‘ultimate responsibility’ for the foreign policy fiasco rested with Ronald Reagan.” (Iran-Contra Reports 1988:891) However, the report was in actuality very soft towards Reagan. It evaded charging the president with truly illegal activities and did not challenge the contention that he was unaware of the actions of his administration. Rather, it “‘faulted the president for failing to live up to his constitutional mandate to ‘take care that the laws be faithfully executed,’ [and] concluded ‘if the President did not know what his

National Security Advisers were doing, he should have.” (Iran-Contra Reports 1988:891) As previously discussed, Congress was very reluctant to attack Reagan after he had won public support and the majority report shows that even Democrats did not want to go too far in accusing him of impeachable offenses.

The situation during the Lewinsky scandal was one of strident partisanship. Clinton, while incredibly popular with much of the public and within his own party, encountered potent distaste from the GOP. Rae and Campbell explain that “republican enmity toward him on Capitol Hill, but even more so at the grass roots of the party, was such that another major scandal might well precipitate such an inquiry even if the country, enjoying unprecedented prosperity, was generally happy with the incumbent.” (2004:21) Thus, despite public disapproval, Republicans kept up a steady march towards impeachment by using their Congressional majority. The tone began to change in November 1998 when the Democrats made a net gain in the midterm elections, an incredible feat for the president’s party made even more astounding given the circumstances of scandal. In an election day exit poll, 64% of respondents answered that they disapproved when asked “do you approve or disapprove of the way the Republicans in Congress have handled the (Bill) Clinton/(Monica) Lewinsky matter?” (VNS Election Day Exit Poll 1998, Nov, 1998) This slightly halted the drive for impeachment so when it went to the Senate for a vote ten Republicans crossed the aisle and voted against the first article (Rae & Campbell 2004:146).

While none of the embroiled presidents had a congressional majority on their side, the partisan situation was less detrimental to Reagan and Clinton than it was to Nixon. Nixon predictably lost all Democratic support very early, but what truly harmed him was the total absence of Republican support by the time of impeachment debates. Both parties in Congress

held back attacks on Reagan and did not indict him in any illegal activities. Finally, Clinton dealt with extreme Republican hostility at first, but it softened considerably after the public made its dissatisfaction with impeachment clear.

Comprehensibility

Some thought must also be given to the comprehensibility of each scandal. These events become packaged for public consumption with key phrases and catch words that it can latch onto. If the details of the scandal are complicated, obscure, or difficult to understand, lay people may be unable to truly comprehend the accusations against the president. The nature of Watergate was graspable to the public, while Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky scandal were more complex.

While the full timeline of events around the Watergate scandal involved complicated dirty tricks, dirty money, wiretapping, and discrediting of enemies, the main bombshell that shook the presidency was the break in into the Democratic National Committee's headquarters. It involved a burglary where the perpetrators were caught and arrested and later determined to be working on behalf of the White House. As part of their famous investigation into the affair, Woodward and Bernstein wrote that "FBI agents have established that the Watergate bugging incident stemmed from a massive campaign of political spying and sabotage conducted on behalf of President Nixon's re-election and directed by officials of the White House and the Committee for the Re-election of the President." (Bernstein & Woodward 1972: 23) These were common crimes that people encountered every day. They knew what breaking in meant, why it was illegal, and more importantly why it was wrong. People could link this illegality directly to the White House and logically conclude that the president had something to do with a burglary. This may have colored their perception of the scandal even before it became big news. Because the

illegal activities were so easy to understand, Nixon could not word his way out and it was easy for the public to directly correlate him with burglary.

In contrast, the Iran-Contra scandal involved a much more complicated situation. First of all, it dealt with foreign affairs that people were not as well informed on. Of course, most of the public knew Iran, but did they know Hezbollah, the true hostage takers? Likewise, they may have been familiar with Nicaragua, but who were the Contras and what were they fighting for? The web became even more entangled when these two separate events came together in a complicated funding diversion plan. The plan itself, and more importantly who orchestrated it, was a network of diversions, associates outside of the government, presidential aides, and obscure constitutional issues. It was difficult to keep track of, and even more difficult to pinpoint Reagan's involvement. Whereas the public was well aware of what burglary meant, it was much less confident in knowledge about covert foreign operations. Because of this, no one was truly sure what had happened and what was illegal. A full nine months after news of the diversion broke, when respondents were asked "how well do you feel you understand what really happened in the Iran/Contra affair? Would you say you understand what happened very well, fairly well, not too well, or not well at all?" only 10% answered "very well." (ABC News/Washington Post Poll, Aug, 1987) Perhaps, the public did not fully comprehend the gravity of the situations and thus continued to support President Reagan.

The Lewinsky scandal was unique in that it was partially comprehensible, but also partially difficult to understand. Of course, even shortly after the scandal broke, the entire country knew Bill Clinton had an affair with Monica Lewinsky. He himself eventually admitted to it. People understood the concept of an affair, and why it was morally wrong. What people could not understand, however, was how Clinton could be impeached for this activity.

Extramarital affairs are not illegal, and certainly not grounds for removal from office, so the ongoing legal battle confused many. This was especially due to the fact that the media focused largely on the affair and the illicit details of the sexual encounters, not the legal questions at hand. Even Bob Woodward, famous for tough journalism during Watergate, stated that "President Nixon essentially said we're going to use the FBI and CIA to break into people's homes and offices, to wiretap and to open mail....He authorized a police state. Now 24 years later, the issue turns not on something of that magnitude, but a dress." (Woodward and Bernstein Criticize Starr 1998: 15) Furthermore, Clinton actively framed the issue as a private matter. Thus, people began to forget about perjury and obstruction of justice and focused more on why the president was being attacked for a sexual affair.

It is clear that of the three scandals, Watergate was by far the most understandable. People could see exactly what he did wrong, whereas this was more of an obscure question in Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky affair. This legacy held true even when people were asked to compare all three. In 1998, a PSRA/Newsweek Poll asked "I'm going to name four major political scandals of the last 24 years--Watergate during (Richard) Nixon's presidency, the Iran-Contra affair during (Ronald) Reagan's presidency, foreign money in the 1996 election, and the (Bill) Clinton/(Monica) Lewinsky scandal. Which one of these four scandals do you personally regard as most serious?" A plurality of 39% still responded Watergate with 23% and 22% going to Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky Affair, respectively (PSRA/Newsweek Poll, Oct, 1998).

Cumulative Effect

Of course, these three scandals did not all occur at the same time, nor did the public ever forget about those that came first. History builds on itself, which means that each scandal influenced the next in a variety of ways. Because Watergate was so monumental, it impacted

both Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky scandal significantly, much more so than the relationship between Iran-Contra and Lewinsky.

While Watergate was certainly not the first scandal to ever hit the presidency, the scope of illegal activities was unprecedented. After the disastrous Vietnam War, the scandal solidified public mistrust of the government and began an era of suspicion that remains today. One of the most important aspects of the cumulative effect of Watergate is that it provided Reagan and Clinton with specific information of what not to do. Seeing how Nixon became so closely entangled with clearly criminal activity, the later presidents made sure to distance themselves from illegality. Although the true extent of Reagan's involvement in Iran-Contra is unknown, the fact that the illegal activity was pinned solely on his subordinates helped eliminate comparisons with Watergate. Likewise, during the Lewinsky scandal Clinton wisely chose to distinguish between his personal affair and the legal issue of perjury and obstruction of justice. By doing so, he retained support even while undergoing the process of impeachment.

Watergate also left an important legacy because it set a certain standard for future scandals. The prevalence of hard evidence in the form of White House tapes created an expectation for Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky affair. In Watergate the public saw firsthand the proof of Nixon's guilt when it heard the tapes and read the transcripts. The issue was much fuzzier in Iran-Contra. No one was really sure how much Reagan knew and if any evidence existed it was likely destroyed by the initial cover up. His claims that he was not culpable for the crimes held water when no proof existed otherwise. Therefore, throughout the Iran-Contra scandal Congress and media were very reluctant to force Reagan out of office, especially when his role in the events was questionable at best. Robert Busby explains "Watergate also had a further pronounced impact upon Democrats' prosecution of the hearings during Iran-Contra. Few

Democrats wished to see Reagan hounded from office, for fear of accusations of malicious intent and an underlying fear that, following on from the experience of Watergate, the removal of a further President could destabilize the American political system and undermine the credibility of the Legislative branch.” (Busby, “Reagan and The Iran-Contra Affair” 1999:171) Similarly, while the evidence of Clinton’s affair was clearly abundant, proof of illegality was more suspect. Of course he had evaded answers in the Jones deposition, but if one believed his reasoning then he had not committed perjury.

Finally, the impact of Watergate was important in Reagan and Clinton’s recoveries because it had completely altered perceptions of the government. Whereas before Watergate, the presidency was revered and respected, after it was met with skepticism and suspicion. Speaking about the Lewinsky scandal, John Harris explains “there was a cynical new mood in the Washington media, which reflected a cynical mood in the political culture generally that had been building since Vietnam and Watergate – national traumas that showed that a large measure of cynicism about presidents was often fully justified.” (Harris 2005:146) When the public expects the president to engage in less than upstanding behavior and a scandal breaks it is simply not all that shocking. In addition, when Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky affair did occur, they did not compare with Watergate. Iran-Contra had been undertaken in good faith to both free American hostages and support an anti-communist group termed “freedom fighters.” Clinton had lied under oath about an affair to protect his family. Compared to burglary, spying, and espionage undertaken to aid Nixon’s reelection, Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky scandal just did not compare. Elizabeth Holtzman, a Democrat who was on the House Judiciary Committee when it voted to impeach Nixon in 1974, explained that Watergate “amounted to ‘a president gone amok, an assertion of presidential powers that was breathtaking and just plain scary.’ In contrast,

she said, President Bill Clinton's behavior with Monica Lewinsky and his cover-up efforts in the sex scandal, 'however disagreeable, distasteful and unpleasant, fell far short of that.'" (Clymer 2002:9)

In these ways the legacy left by Watergate helped Reagan and Clinton cope with scandal when it hit them. It gave Reagan and Clinton an idea of what not to do, set a very high standard for proof and evidence, and created suspicion towards the government so that people expected scandals to occur.

Sex & Morality

Finally, some note must be given to the fact that Clinton's survival was aided by the inherent nature of the Lewinsky affair and the public's views on morality and sex. Whereas both Watergate and Iran-Contra "involved the *institutional* abuse of power by the Executive branch of government, and demonstrated that presidents had a capacity to use and abuse powers at the disposal of the Chief Executive," the Lewinsky scandal centered around the president's extramarital affair (Busby, "Defending the American Presidency" 2001:19). Maybe Clinton had lied about the relationship, but it seemed the public did not consider this an unforgivable offense. In addition, by 1998 views on sex had evolved significantly. It was no secret that Clinton had womanizing tendencies just judging by the amount of allegations against him, and this might have actually helped him in the Lewinsky situation. In addition, he had already successfully navigated potentially embarrassing questions of Marijuana use and shady real estate deals. Denton and Holloway explain that "so much about the negative side of Clinton's character and personality was known by 1996 that the American people most likely forgave or categorized as unimportant the continuing news about his extramarital affairs, campaign funding questions, and Whitewater dealings." (2003:7) They were seen as secondary to his proven ability to lead and

improve the quality of life of many Americans. Apparently, as long as Clinton continued to keep the nation content his private life was relatively unimportant to the majority of the population.

Moreover, news of Clinton's affair was just not that shocking given the fact that "Americans also believed that many public officials have sexual affairs and lie about them, a belief that was confirmed by a spate of confessions by Republicans of their own sexual escapades." (Sonner & Wilcox 1999:557) In fact, Speaker-elect Livingston resigned at the height of the scandal when his own affair was exposed. Because it had become more and more common for the public to learn about the affairs of politicians, the public was almost numb to it. Perhaps if Clinton's presidency fell at a more conservative, traditional time he would not have retained the support of the public as he did.

Whether the president had any sort of control over environmental factors, such as foreign policy, or if he was merely a lucky or unlucky bystander to them, they could have a significant effect on the mood of country. Reagan and Clinton both held office at exceptionally prosperous times economically speaking, and their foreign and domestic responses to unrest, or lack thereof, put more support on their side. In addition, Iran-Contra and the Lewinsky scandal coincidentally happened at times that allowed for more receptiveness to scandal recovery. Finally, there was a relatively low level of comprehensibility in both of these scandals. All of this created a situation where the public was generally more content with the national government, and more specifically with the president. In addition, any success that either Reagan or Clinton could put their name on, such as the end of the Cold War, helped to convince the public that they were worth keeping in office. In contrast, despite the end of the Vietnam War, everything else seemed to collapse around Nixon. The economy began to fail, the student movement erupted and placed the blame squarely on Nixon's shoulders, and his own party turned on him at the most critical

time. Importantly, the comprehensibility of the Watergate crimes also hurt Nixon's chances at survival. With all of this against him Nixon could not count on a happy public to back him up nor could he try to convince people that he was good for the country.

Conclusion

Presidential scandal recovery is impacted from factors on all sides. It is impossible, at least in these three situations, to determine a single event or issue that allows a president to overcome a scandal. This is due in large part to the fact that factors intermingle, become entangled with one another, and are therefore inseparable. Thus, everything combined to create situations either conducive to survival or detrimental to it. However, it is possible to set up a loose set of guidelines that allow or disallow a president to overcome the disgrace of scandal.

First, the president must win over the public with his White House strategy and his personality, both of which constitute the internal factors. Nixon's strategies fostered mistrust, anger, and perceptions of guilt. Then, when he presented himself to the public they saw a secretive man who refused to accept responsibility and who had troubling personal traits. Perhaps learning from Nixon's mistakes, both Reagan and Clinton had wild success with the people, even given their short-lived denial periods. Reagan pushed the guilt onto others in his administration, diverted attention away from the scandal and onto national concerns important to the people, and absolved himself of guilt by claiming ignorance of any illegal activities. As a person, the public saw him cooperate with investigators and accept responsibility for the actions of his administration even though he claimed to not know about them. His persona as "The Gipper" had won over the public long before the scandal and it continued to bolster support for him throughout. In other words, he had a reservoir of support from which he could draw as the administration responded to the charges. Clinton could not articulate a true White House strategy

due to the nature of the Lewinsky scandal, but he did begin to refocus attention away from the scandal and onto supposedly more necessary concerns. More importantly, he was a genius when it came to public relations. He presented himself as a merely a cooperative bystander and bashfully admitted responsibility for the affair, although he continued to adamantly deny any legal wrongdoing through the use of clever semantics. Furthermore, he excused his original lies by claiming a desire to protect his privacy and his family. The public saw a humbled man who had made a personal mistake, but who still cared deeply for his family and his country. Given these situations, Nixon entered into battle with the media and the investigations with an already unhappy public, while Reagan and Clinton had the support of the public backing them in the face of intense media criticism.

With these perceptions in place the presidents began to encounter the external factors of the investigations and the media. Because the public considers these as entities on their own it forms opinions of them in conjunction with its opinions of the president. Therefore two aspects are important in terms of presidential recovery 1) the outcomes of the investigations and the response of the media and 2) the public's reaction to them. All three of the Watergate investigations came down extremely hard on Nixon. They combined to force the issue of the release of the White House tapes and decidedly established his guilt. If not for Nixon's decision to resign, Congress would likely have impeached and removed him from office. The public sympathized with the investigations after the Saturday Night Massacre created support for the special prosecutor and they heard proof of his guilt firsthand on tapes. The media also went on the offensive against Nixon by continuously reporting on the scandal and bringing it to life for the first time on television. Furthermore, the Ervin Committee and House Judiciary Committee hearings enraptured the public and dominated the news for over a year.

Reagan faced a wholly different situation. The Tower Commission and the Congressional investigation virtually declared his innocence, justifying the public's continuous support of the president. In addition, partisanship and bickering in Congress made it impossible for the Democratic opposition to attack him anyway. The one investigation that had the potential to really harm Reagan, Independent Counsel Lawrence Walsh's, was condemned by the public for taking so long, costing too much, and going after an aging president seven years after the scandal. In terms of the media, Reagan had crafted a mutually beneficial relationship with the press through a series of successful press conferences, which placated the desire for information. The media was generally reluctant to attack the president and saw no need to given the low level of interest in Iran-Contra.

Clinton's situation regarding the investigations and the media was unique. All three investigations could have ruined his presidency with the conclusions they drew. Kenneth Starr published a detailed report of Clinton's sexual escapades and provided reasons for impeachment, the House Judiciary Committee found sufficient evidence to send articles of impeachment to Congress, and the full House approved two articles to send to the Senate for trial. Even though the result of the investigations was largely unfavorable towards Clinton, the public backlash against them contributed to his survival. It disapproved of the vulgarity of Starr's report and saw it as a political vendetta against Clinton, and it vociferously protested impeachment. Similarly, Clinton encountered a difficult situation with the media. The spread of rumors, leaks, and false reports, especially on the Internet, created dangerously volatile circumstances that could blow up in the president's face. However, just as with the investigations, the public shifted support away from a media that they considered irresponsible, and therefore gave it to Clinton. Thus, even if the investigations and the media do not support the president, as long as the public in turn does

not support them, he has a much stronger chance of survival.

Finally, the external context of the scandal does not directly impact survival as much as it creates a situation either conducive to recovery or unfavorable to it. A happy and content public is more likely to support the president in order to maintain the status quo. In contrast, if the country is in a time of upheaval it may wish to change the government, and therefore may not wholly support the president in time of scandal. During Watergate the economy was plummeting, domestic unrest was spreading across the country, and the president's own party began to turn on him. In addition, people could understand the severity of breaking and entering, wiretapping, and political sabotage. When Iran-Contra broke the economy was prospering and the Cold War was ending. Also, neither party in Congress showed a strong desire to attack Reagan, the public had a difficult time understanding the details of the funding diversion, and people were generally still wary of the Watergate legacy. Finally, The Lewinsky scandal occurred at a time of remarkable economic growth, peace and prosperity, and more liberal notions of sex and morality. In addition, the Republican majority eventually backed off due to public resistance to impeachment, many did not see how an extramarital affair could lead to removal from office, and Clinton's actions seemed almost trivial when compared to the scope of Watergate.

In conclusion, scandal recovery is not an exact science. Every factor, internal and external, comes into play to create one situation that determines the president's survival. However, Watergate, Iran-Contra, and the Lewinsky scandal show us the public is the most important aspect. The people must support the president and disapprove of those that attack him in order for him to have a chance at healing his presidency and finishing office on a high note. These findings can be applied and used in inevitable future scandals that are sure to strike the

presidency. Although none of the previous scandals are, nor will future scandals be, the same, a general framework is useful in determining the chances that a president has at survival. In terms of internal factors the most important points are cohesiveness of White House strategy, believability of White House strategy, and perception of the president as a person. With regard to the investigations one must look at the reaction of the investigative bodies to the president, the outcomes of the investigations, and public perception of the investigations. The media's attitude toward the president and subsequently the public's attitude toward the media are also important to consider. Finally, a predictive framework for scandal recovery must consider the economy, the level of foreign or domestic unrest, the partisan situation at the time, the nature and comprehensibility of the scandal, and the cumulative effects of other scandals.

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