

# [***Why Jake Tapper made a new series about pre-Trump political scandals***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BC3-X3M1-DY7V-G024-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; There's a funny, interesting and very sad new series on CNN featuring Jake Tapper.

"United States of Scandal," which premieres Sunday at 9 p.m. ET, profiles a number of politicians behaving badly during the pre-Trump political era.

Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich's bombastic defense of himself. The slow-burn implosion of North Carolina Sen. John Edwards during and after the 2008 presidential campaign. A New Jersey governor coming out of the closet just happens to distract everyone from what might have been the actual scandal. A South Carolina governor disappears and is not on the Appalachian Trail. There's more where that came from.

If you lived through these scandals, as I did, it is almost unbelievable to relive them. If you are encountering them for the first time, it will be an education in what Tapper calls his "Jar Jar Binks" theory. More on that below.

I talked to Tapper about some of these scandals, how they translate at a time where former President Donald Trump has redefined the whole idea of scandal, and why he wanted to do the series now.

Our conversation, conducted by email, is below:

**WOLF:** Why did you want to do this series? Why now?

**TAPPER:** I've covered American ***politics*** now for the better part of three decades and I've always questioned why politicians are willing to risk careers they'd worked on for decades for what seem like trifling or at least ephemeral pursuits.

Considering our current political climate and the complex web of scandals surrounding our former president - not to mention allegations against Hunter Biden, Matt Gaetz, George Santos, and on and on - it felt like a good time to revisit comparable events from recent history with new context and insights directly from the people who were there.

And also, these are great stories, in the most traditional sense of that word, Shakespearean in many ways.

**WOLF**: How did you define "scandal" when you approached this series? What are the components of a scandal?

**TAPPER:** Scandals are everywhere in ***politics*** - they can range from a lewd selfie to illegally shopping around a US Senate seat to mishandling a pandemic to misrepresenting a casus belli (an event that justifies a war or conflict).

Scandals involve twisted moral compasses and inflated egos that lead politicians to believe that they can get away with wrongdoings and not be caught. Sometimes, however, they are.

**WOLF:** You and I both were working in journalism when all of these scandals broke. And they all predate the Trump era, which I think has redefined what we consider to be a scandal. Did revisiting these scandals change your understanding of them?

**TAPPER:** The scandals involving Trump are so vast and complex and ongoing. They have certainly numbed the public's perception of a scandal and changed the typical playbook in which public officials, feeling shame, resign to avoid further public scrutiny.

After the January 6, 2021, insurrection and the attempt by Trump to subvert democracy, most of these scandals might not seem particularly galling - but the human frailties unmasked, the fascinating narratives, the behind-the-scenes testimonies are no less compelling.

**WOLF:** These scandals cut across party - there are Republicans and Democrats. They cut across the country - there are scandals in the South, the Northeast and the Midwest. You revisit sex scandals, corruptions scandals and a spy scandal. Is there anything that ties together politicians who get wrapped up in a scandal? Is it a character trait? Intoxication with power?

**TAPPER:** I have a theory called the "Jar Jar Binks" theory, which is that every great person rises to a level where they can remove from their circle anyone telling them when they're making a mistake. (Like putting a ridiculous Jamaican frog-man in your incredible films.) Most of these folks removed all critics and checks on their behavior from their inner circles.

**WOLF:** There are funny and serious moments in all of these episodes. But the most disturbing episode, at least for me, is about the outing of CIA officer Valerie Plame. That episode is not about politicians being buffoons, but about pettiness and a too chummy relationship between journalists and the people they cover. Has any of that changed in the past 20 years?

**TAPPER:** It has in some ways improved and in some ways gotten worse. There are media organizations whose business models depend on chumminess and preaching to choirs. I think it's not just a disservice to facts and truth; it's a disservice to democracy.

**WOLF:** The scandals you profile led to jail sentences for just one politician (Blagojevich) and one aide (Scooter Libby). Blagojevich later had his sentence commuted by Trump and Libby was pardoned by Trump. What does that say about the justice system?

**TAPPER:** It says that misdeeds can be excused if one has the right connections. Trump - who himself is being accused of corruption and conspiracy - sent a clear message that he doesn't take these crimes, nor those of Roger Stone or Mike Flynn and on and on, seriously and as such, they should be forgiven.

But it's actually the opposite - these types of crimes make Americans lose all faith in their government, during a time when trust in politicians is at historic lows.

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