

NASP - Collegio Carlo Alberto Days

# Valence Theory and Political Scandals: a Conjoint Experiment proposal

Stefano Sangiovanni

POLS 39 - University of Milan

June 27, 2024, Turin

# Trump Says He Could 'Shoot Somebody' and Still Maintain Support

"I could stand in the middle of Fifth Avenue and shoot somebody, okay, and I wouldn't lose any voters, okay?"



# Valence Theory and Political Scandals

- **Valence issues** are key factors influencing voter behaviour alongside traditional left-right distinctions and policy positions (Groseclose, 2001; Jacoby, 2009; Clark, 2009)
- Valence dimensions: refer to “character-based values” like honesty, competence, charisma, likability and unity (Clark, 2009; Adams, 2001)
- Political scandals, exposing misconduct or corruption, shape perceptions of candidate integrity and competence (Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, 2014; Rottinghaus, 2023)
- Scandals should be perceived as negative valence information (Doherty, Dowling, and Miller, 2014; Rottinghaus, 2023), shaping voter perceptions of integrity and competence
- Voters should appreciate politicians who are not involved in any scandals and should judge those that are involved

# Political Scandals: a definition

- Characterized by **norm-breaking behavior** deviating from societal norms, moral codes, or values (Genovese and Farrar-Myers, 2010; Thompson, 2013)
- Allegations of illegal, unethical, or immoral conduct directed at politicians or institutions (Rottinghaus, 2023), they attract public scrutiny and attention (Thompson, 2013; Marion, 2010)
  - **Financial Scandal:** personal financial gain from actions (e.g., corruption, bribery, tax evasion)
  - **Personal Scandal:** immoral, illegal or unethical personal behavior (e.g., drug use, adultery, sexual allegations)
- Some studies find that scandals have negative political consequences even in polarized contexts (Darr et al., 2019; Wolsky, 2022), while others suggest minimal impact on politicians' careers and electoral behavior (Funck and McCabe, 2021)

# Gaps in Political Scandal Research

- Limited focus on types of scandals beyond corruption, reducing generalizability (Kumlin and Esaiasson, 2012)
- Insufficient research on voters' reactions to different types of scandals
- Lack of systematic comparisons across various contexts and scandal types (Kumlin and Esaiasson, 2012)
- Effects of different scandal types on electoral behavior in polarized contexts remain poorly understood (Puglisi and Snyder, 2011; Darr et al., 2019; Rottinghaus, 2023)

# Developing a Choice-Based Conjoint Experiment

Developing a design for a choice-based conjoint experiment ([Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2014](#)) that will address two research questions about political scandals

## RQ 1

How do voters prioritize **the significance of political scandals compared to other factors** such as candidates' party affiliation and policy positions in their assessments of politicians?

## RQ 2

To what extent do **shared values**, such as co-partisanship and ideological alignment on key issues, **moderate the impact of political scandals** on voters' evaluations of candidates?

# What is a conjoint experiment?

- **Substantively:** a tool to understand people's decision-making
- **Technically:** a factorial survey experiment designed to measure preferences (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2014)
  - It tests how varying one attribute over another influences respondents' choices
  - E.g. why do voters prefer one party, politician, or policy over another?
- **Multi-dimensionality:** it involves choices that vary across multiple attributes simultaneously (Franchino and Zucchini, 2015)

# Why developing a conjoint experiment?

- Display high levels of **validity**
  - **External validity:** effectively approximate real-world outcomes (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto, 2015; Auerbach and Thachil, 2018)
  - **Internal validity:** enhance realism relative to the direct elicitation of preferences on a single dimension
- **Measurement quality:** respondents are found to be consistent even for quite complex tasks (Bansak et al., 2019)
- **Reduce social desirability** biases such as vote for female (vs male) political candidates (Teele, Kalla, and Rosenbluth, 2018)



# Experimental Design

- Fully randomized conjoint design ([Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto, 2014](#))
- Participants will express a preference between two politicians with differing characteristics across various attributes
- Each respondent will undergo demographic, political, and non-conjoint questions before or after the decision-making task
- Present detailed-rich fictional scenarios where two candidates compete in an actual election ([Galasso, Nannicini, and Nunnari, 2023](#))

# Experimental Design: Attribute and levels

- Candidate's traits: Gender, Party Affiliation
- Include real and relevant policy issues as attributes to immerse participants in a real-world context ([Morton and Williams, 2011](#))
  - e.g. Immigration, Green policies, Education, Taxation, EU integration
- Focus on Financial and Personal scandals ([Rottinghaus, 2023](#))
- Use neutral categories for better interpretation of AMCEs ([Bansak et al., 2022](#))

# Experimental Design: Attribute and Levels (an example)

**Table:** Attributes and Levels (conjoint profiles)

Attributes	Levels
Gender	Male Female
Party Affiliation	Republican Indipendent Democratic
Position on Immigration	Support immigration Neutral Oppose immigration
Position on Green Policies	Support green policies Netural Oppose green policies
Scandal	No scandal Sexual Allegations Drug Use Collusion with authoritarian regime Corruption Misuse of public funds Accepting bribes

- $C = 2$
- $A = \{1, \dots, 5\}$
- $L_1 = \{1, 2\}$ ,  
 $L_{2,3,4} = \{1, 2, 3\}$ ,  
 $L_5 = \{1, \dots, 7\}$
- 378 profiles, fully randomized design

# Experimental Design: An Example

Table: Candidate 1

Attributes	Levels
Gender	Female
Party Affiliation	Republican
Position on Immigration	Oppose immigration
Position on Green Policies	Oppose green policies
Scandal	Corruption

Table: Candidate 2

Attributes	Levels
Gender	Male
Party Affiliation	Democratic
Position on Immigration	Neutral
Position on Green Policies	Support green policies
Scandal	Sexual allegations

- Online data collection: cheaper, relatively fast, more flexible, more control over the experimental design
- Platforms: CloudResearch, MTurk, Prolific, Qualtrics (Peer et al., 2021)
- Addressing downsides (Kennedy et al., 2020) of online platforms:
  - Mitigating low-effort respondents with multiple attention (Paolacci, 2010), comprehension (Gordon et al., 2019) and bot (Agley et al., 2022) checks
- Transparency (Munafò et al., 2017)

# Data analysis approach

- Analyze both causal and descriptive estimands (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley, 2020)
- **AMCE:** The average effect of varying one attributes of a profile on the probability that that profile will be chosen by a respondent (Bansak et al., 2022)
- **Subgroup analyses** in order to discover preference heterogeneity
  - Descriptive use of conditional AMCEs can be misleading (e.g. in comparisons of between subgroups of respondents) (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley, 2020)
- **ACIE:** Difference in the AMCEs of a given attribute between conditional on another attribute
  - The impact of one attribute (e.g. party affiliation) can change depending on the value of another attribute (e.g. scandal)

# Potential (Methodological) Innovations

- Developing a Bayesian experimental design (Haloner and Verdinelli, 1995; Sándor and Wedel, 2001)
  - Use a Bayesian approach to compare posterior distributions of AMCEs
  - Model candidate choice as a Bernoulli distribution with a Bayesian likelihood function
- Incorporate techniques from visual conjoint experiments (Vecchiato and Munger, 2021) to analyze the role of political scandals
- Examine the impact of political scandals on various institutions, incumbency status, and political experience (Basinger and Rottinghaus, 2012; Franchino and Zucchini, 2015)

# Conclusions

- Conjoint experiment can provide new insights into the impact of political scandals on voter preferences
- Highlights how voters balance scandal information with party affiliation and policy positions
- Reveals differences in voter reactions to financial versus personal scandals
- Enhances understanding of voter behavior in polarized political contexts
- Provides insights into how partisanship influences the perception of political scandals



**Thank You for Your Attention!**

- Adams, James (2001). "A Theory of Spatial Competition with Biased Voters: Party Policies Viewed Temporally and Comparatively". *British Journal of Political Science* **31**.(1), 121–158.
- Agley, Jon et al. (2022). "Quality Control Questions on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (MTurk): A Randomized Trial of Impact on the USAUDIT, PHQ-9, and GAD-7". *Behavior Research Methods* **54**.(2), 885–897.  
DOI: [10.3758/s13428-021-01665-8](https://doi.org/10.3758/s13428-021-01665-8).
- Auerbach, Adam Michael and Tariq Thachil (2018). "How Clients Select Brokers: Competition and Choice in India's Slums". *American Political Science Review* **112**.(4), 775–791.
- Bansak, Kirk et al. (2019). "Beyond the Breaking Point? Survey Satisficing in Conjoint Experiments". *Political Science Research and Methods*, 1–19.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/gf8qgq>.
- (2022). "Using Conjoint Experiments to Analyze Election Outcomes: The Essential Role of the Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE)". *Social Science Research Network (SSRN)*.  
URL: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3588941>.
- Basinger, Scott and Brandon Rottinghaus (2012). "Stonewalling: Explaining Presidential Behavior During Scandal". *Political Research Quarterly* **65**.(2), 290–302.
- Clark, Michael (2009). "Valence and Electoral Outcomes in Western Europe, 1976–1998". *Electoral Studies* **28**.(1), 111–122.
- Darr, Joshua P. et al. (2019). "Collision with Collusion: Partisan Reaction to the Trump-Russia Scandal". *Perspectives on Politics* **17**.(3), 772–787.
- Doherty, David, Conor M Dowling, and Michael G Miller (2014). "Does Time Heal All Wounds? Sex Scandals, Tax Evasion, and the Passage of Time". *PS: Political Science & Politics* **47**.(2), 357–366.

- Franchino, Fabio and Francesco Zucchini (May 2015). "Voting in a Multi-dimensional Space: A Conjoint Analysis Employing Valence and Ideology Attributes of Candidates". *Political Science Research and Methods* **3**(2), 221–241. ISSN: 2049-8470, 2049-8489.  
DOI: 10.1017/psrm.2014.24.
- Funck, Amy S. and Katherine T. McCabe (2021). "Partisanship, Information, and the Conditional Effects of Scandal on Voting Decisions". *Political Behavior* **44**, 1389–1409.
- Galasso, Vincenzo, Tommaso Nannicini, and Salvatore Nunnari (2023). "Positive Spillovers from Negative Campaigning". *American Journal of Political Science* **67**(1), 5–21.  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12610>. eprint:  
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1111/ajps.12610>.
- Genovese, Michael A. and Victoria A. Farrar-Myers (2010). *Corruption and American Politics*. Amherst, N.Y.: Cambria Press.
- Gordon, Andrew et al. (2019). "Keeping Track of 'Alternative Facts': The Neural Correlates of Processing Misinformation Corrections". *NeuroImage* **193**, 46–56.  
DOI: 10.1016/j.neuroimage.2019.03.014.
- Groseclose, Tim (2001). "A Model of Candidate Location When One Candidate Has a Valence Advantage". *American Journal of Political Science*, 862–886.
- Hainmueller, Jens, Dominik Hangartner, and Teppei Yamamoto (2015). "Validating Vignette and Conjoint Survey Experiments Against Real-World Behavior". *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* **112**(8), 2395–2400.
- Hainmueller, Jens, Daniel J. Hopkins, and Teppei Yamamoto (2014). "Causal Inference in Conjoint Analysis: Understanding Multidimensional Choices via Stated Preference Experiments". *Political Analysis* **22**(1), 1–30. ISSN: 1047-1987, 1476-4989.  
DOI: 10.1093/pan/mpt024.

- Haloner, Kathryn and Isabella Verdinelli (1995). "Bayesian Experimental Design: A Review". *Statistical Science* 10.(3), 273–304.
- Jacoby, William G (2009). "Public Opinion during a Presidential Campaign: Distinguishing the Effects of Environmental Evolution and Attitude Change". *Electoral Studies* 28.(3), 422–436.
- Kennedy, Ryan et al. (2020). "The Shape of and Solutions to the MTurk Quality Crisis". *Political Science Research and Methods* 8.(4), 614–629.  
DOI: 10.1017/psrm.2020.6.
- Kumlin, Staffan and Peter Esaiasson (2012). "Scandal Fatigue? Scandal Elections and Satisfaction with Democracy in Western Europe, 1977–2007". *British Journal of Political Science* 42.(2), 263–282.
- Leeper, Thomas J., Sara B. Hobolt, and James Tilley (2020). "Measuring Subgroup Preferences in Conjoint Experiments". *Political Analysis* 28.(2), 207–221.  
DOI: 10.1017/pan.2019.30.
- Marion, Nancy E. (2010). *The politics of disgrace: The role of political scandal in American politics*. Carolina Academic Press.
- Morton, R. B. and K. C. Williams (2011). "Electoral systems and strategic voting (laboratory election experiments)". *Cambridge Handbook of Experimental Political Science*. Ed. by J. N. Druckman et al. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 369–383.
- Munafò, Marcus R. et al. (2017). "A Manifesto for Reproducible Science". *Nature Human Behaviour* 1.(1), 1–9.  
DOI: 10.1038/s41562-016-0021.
- Paolacci, Gabriele (2010). "Running Experiments on Amazon Mechanical Turk". *Judgment and Decision Making* 5.(5), 9.

- Peer, Eyal et al. (2021). “Data Quality of Platforms and Panels for Online Behavioral Research”. *Behavior Research Methods*.  
DOI: 10.3758/s13428-021-01694-3.
- Puglisi, Riccardo and James M. Snyder (July 2011). “Newspaper Coverage of Political Scandals”. *The Journal of Politics* **73**.(3), 931–950. ISSN: 0022-3816, 1468-2508.  
DOI: 10.1017/S0022381611000569.
- Rottinghaus, Brandon (2023). “Do Scandals Matter?” *Political Research Quarterly* **76**.(4), 1932–1943.  
DOI: 10.1177/10659129231185532. eprint: <https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129231185532>.
- Sándor, Z. and M. Wedel (2001). “Designing Conjoint Choice Experiments Using Managers’ Prior Beliefs”. *Journal of Marketing Research* **38**.(4), 430–444.  
DOI: 10.1509/jmkr.38.4.430.18904.
- Teele, Dawn Langan, Joshua Kalla, and Frances Rosenbluth (2018). “The Ties That Double Bind: Social Roles and Women’s Underrepresentation in Politics”. *American Political Science Review* **112**.(3), 525–541.
- Thompson, John B. (2013). *Political scandal: Power and visibility in the media age*. Polity Press.
- Vecchiato, A. and K. Munger (2021). *Visual Conjoint: Twitter Profiles*.  
URL: <https://doi.org/10.31219/osf.io/ar7up>.
- Wolsky, Adam D. (2022). “Scandal, Hypocrisy, and Resignation: How Partisanship Shapes Evaluations of Politicians’ Transgressions”. *Journal of Experimental Political Science* **9**, 74–87.