Do Political Scandals Affect Voters' Evaluation of Politicians While Other Factors Exist? Empirical Evidence from A Conjoint Experiment in the U.K.

Abstract

Based on the theory of valence issues, political scandals are salient because they reveal low-cost information about a political actor's quality, e.g., honesty or integrity. However, our understanding of how political scandals affect voters' evaluation of politicians is still limited due to the designs of prior literature, which have been unrealistic or lacking sufficient internal validity. To fill this gap in the literature, I employ a conjoint analysis design to examine the following questions: 1) In high-information political contexts, and independent of policy considerations, do citizens consider the onset of a political scandal in their decision to support individual politicians? 2) Are the effects of scandals heterogeneous based on certain conditions such as candidates' or voters' party affiliation, or both? 3) Do the effects of political scandals spill over from the prime minister to ministers, or vice versa? The evidence reveals that scandals—particularly scandals involving sexual harassment—lower candidates' evaluations, and that this valence attribute is significantly stronger than both partisan and policy preferences but could be mitigated by them. Furthermore, when one cabinet member is involved in a scandal, voters tend to devalue and blame the cabinet as a whole, regardless of whether it is a coalition government or not.

Key words: Political Scandals, Valence Issue, Conjoint Analysis, Spill-Over Effect

1 Introduction

Ever since Downs (1957), the spatial model has posited that there are differences between ideological preferences in a single-dimensional ideological space, with citizens seeking to move policy closer to their ideal point (Stokes 1963). However, scholars have criticized the assumption of unidimensionality as being overly simplistic. In fact, scholars have demonstrated that in addition to ideological position, there is a second dimension that can complement explanations of differences among individuals' ideal points (Jacoby 2009). This second dimension is often defined as the valence dimension, which usually refers to politicians' character-based image regarding their electability, honesty, competence, charisma, likability, and unity (Adams 2001). Empirically, studies have shown that voters tend to evaluate politicians or parties through their valence—in addition to their ideology/policies—to make political decisions (Adams et al. 2011; Clark 2009; Groseclose 2001).

This paper is built upon the theory of valence issues. According to this theory, valence has two characteristics. First, valence features politicians' and/or parties' qualities such as honesty or competence (Adams 2012). Second, unlike with policies or ideologies, voters have identical preferences about valence issues (Franchino and Zucchini 2015) In other words, it is reasonable to infer that voters tend to appreciate politicians and governments with positive valence and tend to devalue those with negative valence. For instance, political scandals have been considered a form of negative valence that adversely affects politics. Indeed, political scandals are defined as actions or events that transgress or contravene values, norms, or moral codes (Thompson 2013). Thus, the onset of political scandals rattles the public trust given to public officials by citizens and, as a result, it has become a salient topic of political science research (e.g., Barnes and Beaulieu 2014; Charron and Bågenholm 2016; Clark 2014).

Thus far, however, our understanding of the behavioral effects of political scandals has been limited in two primary ways. First, the existing literature has offered no definitive con-

clusion regarding the causal mechanism of how political scandals impact voters' behavior, mostly because the research designs that have been implemented can only examine correlation, not causality. Second, although many empirical studies have adopted experimental designs, their results are unrealistic because these are often single-treatment designs—they only prime respondents on political scandals, which is unrealistic given that voters usually have to consider multiple pieces of information at the same time. Therefore, the question of how much voters weigh each dimension to process information when observing politicians' policies or ideologies and their valence—such as when evaluating politicians—remains unanswered. This study's first contribution is to answer the following question: "In high-information political contexts, and independent of policy considerations, do citizens consider the onset of a political scandal in their decision to support individual politicians?"

A conjoint experimental design presents all factors simultaneously to respondents and forces them to make choices based on these simultaneous factors. By adopting this design, this paper examines how political scandals (negative valence) affect voters' evaluation of politicians while they also receive information of the first dimension—i.e., those politicians' policy positions and ideology positions—which is usually considered more influential. Compared to the design of previous studies (e.g., Gerber and Green 1999; Zaller 1992), this design presents more nuanced information by examining the impact of scandals along with other factors, such as partisan and policy positions, on how voters evaluate/choose candidates.

In addition to scandals' average effect, this paper also examines the question of whether this effect is heterogeneous. According to the literature, such heterogeneity can be unilateral or reciprocal. From the unilateral perspective, first, the theory of cognitive bias explains that politicians' attributes may cause voters to perceive political scandals differently. For instance, Barnes and Beaulieu (2014) demonstrate that female politicians are usually perceived as less likely to engage in corruption because they are presumed to be honest. Second,

based on the theory of moral foundation, Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009) argue that voters' own attributes, such as ideologies, may affect how they process political scandals. In other words, voters' ideologies are formed based on how they naturally view things differently and, therefore, voters may evaluate scandals differently based on their unique views/ideologies. On the other hand, reciprocally speaking, the theory of motivated reasoning demonstrates that voters only pay attention to information that is consistent with their pre-existing beliefs. Moreover, they resist information that contradicts their predispositions (Bolsen, Druckman and Cook 2014; Zaller 1992). In other words, when voters and politicians share similar values—such as being co-partisan or sharing the same ideologies—scandals' negative effects may be reduced. The present study will further examine these three potential perspectives of scandals' heterogeneous effects.

Finally, this paper focuses on how scandal involvement affects voters' evaluation of cabinets, in addition to their evaluation of candidates. The study's final question is whether the effects of political scandals spill over within the cabinet; i.e., from the prime minister to ministers and vice versa. Recent literature has found that from the perspective of the first dimension—i.e., policies and ideologies—voters tend to consider a cabinet as a unit of members who share similar policy stances, ideological positions, and policy accountability (Fortunato and Adams 2015; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Duch, Przepiorka and Stevenson 2015). This is because voters tend to consider relatively simple and low-cost information—such as a cabinet's combination—as heuristics to form their perception of candidates and governments. Therefore, voters perceive all members of a cabinet, even if it is a coalition, to share similar policy stances. Based on this theory, if voters can use the belief of "being in the same cabinet" to inform themselves about cabinet members' policy positions, it should also be true that voters will utilize such heuristics to inform themselves about cabinet members' valence. In sum, when one cabinet member—whether it is the prime minister or a minister—is involved in a political scandal, voters will devalue the whole cabinet's valence

even if it is a coalition cabinet.

To analyze this final question, the study's design maintains most of its settings unchanged (except for the candidates) but creates two further rounds of choice-making procedures where the targets are either the prime minister or a minister. In addition, each respondent will observe the attributes—including partisanship, policy position, and scandal involvement—of another (unspecified) cabinet member or the prime minister, so that he/she can make an evaluation/choice regarding the current prime minister or ministers. In other words, if a prime minister's involvement in a scandal significantly and negatively impacts voters' choices regarding a minister (and *vice versa*), this result would demonstrate that voters expect cabinet members to share similar levels of valence.

Most of the study's findings are consistent with the above expectations. First, voters rely on multiple heuristics, especially political scandals, to make political decisions. Second, voters' own attributes—particularly their ideological positions—function as a bias when it comes to scandals' negative effects. Furthermore, when voters and politicians share a certain common value, the magnitude of effects is reduced but not eliminated—as prior studies have presented. Last but not least, the present study's results are the first to confirm that voters tend to merge cabinet members' valence characteristics. In other words, they tend to perceive the valence of a cabinet/government as a whole, regardless of whether the cabinet in question is a coalition or not.

2 How Do Political Scandals Affect Political Actors?

Studies have argued that voters tend to leverage simple heuristics, in addition to ideology, to inform themselves and to make political decisions, typically due to either their

inability to process complex information or their natural inclination to consider multiple sources Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien (2016); Clarke et al. (2004); Clark (2009); Fortunato and Stevenson (2013); Jacoby (2009); Stokes (1963). These simple heuristics are usually linked to "valence issues," which refer to politicians' character-based images regarding their honesty, competence, charisma, likability, and unity (Adams 2012).[1] According to this theory, and since valence issues reveal politicians' personal qualities, voters intrinsically consider valence to evaluate politicians. Unsurprisingly, valence usually impacts both voters' and politicians' behaviors (Adams et al. 2011; Clark 2009). Indeed, valence issues encompass the non-policy qualities that citizens value in their elected representatives. Citizens ultimately desire to have high-valence representatives whom they can trust not to shirk their political responsibilities (Stone and Simas 2010; Mondak 1995).

Given that scandals expose vicious and/or unpleasant images regarding political actors' character-based values, scandals must be categorized as valence-related information. For instance, politicians who misreport funds are considered to be dishonest and/or incompetent. This type of dishonesty or incompetence exhibited by a politician can signal representational shirking to citizens, violating the public trust between elected representatives and their citizens. Other scandalous issues, such as sexual harassment, are often considered despicable and a violation of the moral values held by citizens. Furthermore, political scandals are usually presented in the format of straightforward narratives describing politicians' personal anecdotes. Thus, unlike policies themselves, scandals are never complex sources of information requiring voters to have a certain level of knowledge to understand their contexts. Therefore, given the combination of valence and simplicity, scandals are expected to be a significant type of informational heuristic through which voters evaluate politicians. Indeed, previous studies have found that individual involvement in scandals harms the political ca-

[1]The other school equates valence to "issue ownership," which refers to how politicians who are recognized as "handling" a certain issue well are considered to be competent on that issue, rather than being considered competent (or not) based on their positions on that issue (Clarke et al. 2004). The present paper is in line with the approach of character-based images.

reers of elected elites (Doherty, Dowling and Miller 2014).

At the same time, studies have demonstrated that a scandal's magnitude may not be universal but rather conditional. The first explanation for this is based on the theories of cognitive bias and moral foundation. Adopting the theory of cognitive bias, Barnes and Beaulieu (2014) point out that voters' gender stereotypes bias how they perceive corruption. In contrast to men, women are considered to be ethical, honest, and so on; thus, female politicians are usually perceived as less likely to engage in corruption. From the perspective of cognitive bias, candidates' attributes—such as gender—may affect how voters perceive their involvement in scandals. In other words, who the candidates are may affect how voters perceive their negative valence. In addition to candidates' attributes, the literature shows that voters' attributes—such as their ideologies—can lead to different perceptions of the same scandal. In general, based on the theory of moral foundation, liberals and conservatives naturally hold different views. As this theory argues, liberals prioritize individualizing values, focusing on equity, justice, and protecting individual rights. In contrast, conservatives appreciate binding values, emphasizing in-group loyalty, authority, and purity (van der Linden and Panagopoulos 2019). Given the fundamental differences of these views, the literature has demonstrated that the difference of value concentration attached to ideology affects or biases how voters perceive political scandals, such as sexual harassment (Graham, Haidt and Nosek 2009; van der Linden and Panagopoulos 2019). Ultimately, this approach demonstrates that individuals' attributes, either belonging to the politicians in question or to the voters themselves, can bias how political scandals are perceived.

The second explanation is based on so-called motivated reasoning. According to this theory, voters are not motivated by the accuracy of information to form their perceptions but rather by its "direction" (Slothuus and De Vreese 2010). In other words, when forming their opinions, voters give more weight to information that is consistent with their pre-

existing beliefs than to information that contradicts their beliefs (Bolsen, Druckman and Cook 2014). As a consequence, voters tend to search for political information that agrees with their opinions and resist information that contradicts their predispositions (Zaller 1992). When voters with particular identities are tied to specific parties or ideologies, motivated reasoning predicts that they will pay more attention to the positive events regarding their parties/ideologies, ignore the negative events, and strive to maintain and defend their existing values (Slothuus and De Vreese 2010). Indeed, scholars have shown that being co-partisan or holding the same ideology significantly reduces the magnitude of scandals' negative effects on politicians, parties, and governments (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz 2013; Charron and Bågenholm 2016; Eggers 2014; Funk 1996; Gerber and Green 1999).

3 Research Questions and Hypotheses

How political scandals affect politics has been widely tested by observational data and through experimental designs (e.g. Carlson, Ganiel and Hyde 2000; Doherty, Dowling and Miller 2014; Funk 1996; McDermott, Schwartz and Vallejo 2015). However, we are not aware of whether voters still weigh political scandals as heavily as has been claimed under a complex information system in which the traditionally recognized "primary" dimension—i.e., ideology—exists. As explained above, in the real world, individuals usually do not consider only one factor but rely on multiple sources of information at the same time to make decisions. Although a single manipulation experiment guarantees internal validity through randomization, it does not allow respondents to consider multiple alternatives or researchers to compare the magnitude of the effects of different alternatives simultaneously. In particular, such a design may prime respondents on the importance of scandals and further overemphasize their impact. Consequently, this traditional approach may limit our under-

standing of the causal impact of political scandals.

Thus, the core questions that this project seeks to answer are quite straightforward. Namely, do voters consider scandals when evaluating candidates while they receive other forms of information, such as candidates' party affiliation and policy positions? If so, how do these scandals impact voters' evaluation of politicians? By adopting a conjoint analysis design, this project's findings can deepen our understanding of how political scandals affect politics.

Through the use of a conjoint experimental design, which is explained in greater detail below, I am able to further divide the study's core question into several smaller questions to develop a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding. The first of these smaller research questions is: In high-information contexts where citizens are exposed to multiple pieces of information at the same time, do citizens consider political scandals when evaluating politicians? In reality, voters usually consider more than a single heuristic when evaluating politicians. Normally, voters perceive a combination of different attributes—including gender, party affiliation, and policy positions—to shape their evaluations of key political actors. Following the theory of valence (among other factors), this paper argues that voters tend to utilize simple information regarding whether politicians are involved in political scandals to form their preferences. Therefore, the study's first hypothesis is as follows:

H 1 *Voters prefer politicians who are* NOT *involved in political scandals.*

Furthermore, as suggested by the theories of cognitive bias and moral foundation, scandals' effects should theoretically be conditional on either politicians' or voters' personal attributes such as gender, ideology, and/or party affiliation (Barnes and Beaulieu 2014; Charron and Bågenholm 2016; Ecker, Glinitzer and Meyer 2016). On the one hand, politicians' attributes may affect how voters perceive them and then further impact how voters evaluate their performance. As explained above, female politicians are usually considered

as being more ethical and honest and thus further reduce the negativity of perceived corruption (Barnes and Beaulieu 2014; Funk 1996). On the one hand, politicians' attributes may affect how voters perceive them and also impact how voters evaluate their performance. As explained above, female politicians are usually seen as being more ethical and honest, which further reduces the negativity of any perceived corruption (Graham, Haidt and Nosek 2009; van der Linden and Panagopoulos 2019). On the other hand, individuals' ideology can determine how they perceive political scandals due to their psychological differences (van der Linden and Panagopoulos 2019), which also make them partisan to the ideology to which they are highly attached. Thus, we must expect scandals' effects to be conditional on such factors, as well. This study also tests two hypotheses regarding whether the negative effects of political scandals are conditional on individuals' attributes, either on the voters' side or on the politicians' side. The second and third hypotheses are as follows:

H 2 *The magnitude of political scandals' effects varies based on politicians' gender, party affiliation, and positions on the issue of EU integration.*

H 3 *The magnitude of political scandals' effects varies based on respondents' gender, party affiliation, positions on the issue of EU integration, educational level, and age.*

As demonstrated by the theory of motivated reasoning, scandals' effects are mitigated by voters' pre-existing preferences or predispositions. Simply put, if this theory is correct, what we should observe is that when voters and politicians hold similar values—such as co-partisanship, similar policy positions, and/or the same gender—scandals' effects should decrease or even vanish since voters tend to ignore information that contradicts their beliefs (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Anduiza, Gallego and Muñoz 2013; Eggers 2014). Following this theory, the final hypothesis is:

H 4 *When politicians and voters share certain common attributes—such as gender, partisanship, or policy positions—political scandals' effects should be weakened.*

4 Research Design

This paper contributes to the field of political scandals by overcoming the aforementioned issues in the literature to reach a more robust understanding of the causal effects of political scandals on political behavior. To do so, this paper adopts a conjoint experimental design, which provides two key advantages in the investigation of the causal effects of political scandals on citizens' evaluations of politicians. First, internal validity is preserved through randomization. In this design, random assignment is achieved by randomly assigning a number of different treatments that are presented in list form. Furthermore, at least two lists are assigned, which allows participants to pick the list they prefer or to rank all the lists. In this project, since each participant randomly received two lists combining politicians' attributes across all possible levels of comparison, the estimated causal effects of each treatment should be unbiased, including the measurement of the effects of political scandals on voters' preferences towards politicians.

[Figure 1 about here.]

Second, in contrast to survey experiments, the conjoint analysis experiment can more accurately resemble the real-world scenario in which human beings usually consider multiple aspects of an issue simultaneously to make decisions. Under the traditional experimental design, participants are asked to respond to one single manipulation, and researchers then estimate the treatment's causal effects through the experimental results. However, this design is limited because researchers are unable to compare different treatments and determine which observed outcomes should be attributed to which treatments (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto 2013; Hainmueller and Hopkins 2015). In a conjoint design, respondents are forced to evaluate multiple treatments at the same time. This allows researchers to carefully examine how respondents weigh different treatments. In other words, although it has been

proven that scandals have significant impacts on politics, a conjoint experiment can help us to further determine scandals' causal effects and decide how much respondents rely on scandals to make decisions, as compared to other factors.

The study's data were collected in 2018 with the help of the EssexLab at the University of Essex. All of the eligible participants belonged to the sample pool recruited by the EssexLab in advance. To increase external validity, 120 random participants (from the sample pool) who did not take the survey in the lab on any session were invited to take the survey remotely. Figure 1 below presents the distribution of in-lab and online respondents' characteristics. As Figure 1 shows, the in-lab respondents were younger, relatively liberal (in terms of partisanship and policy), and had higher levels of education. Including the online samples helps to somewhat increase the samples' divergence.[2]

In this experiment, respondents were asked to make a choice between pairs of politicians several times. After a short introduction explaining the experiment's purpose, each participant faced three rounds of decision-making tasks and one round of demographic questions. At the beginning of each round of decision-making tasks, respondents were provided with a sample profile with instructions regarding how they should interpret the profile, as Figure 2 shows.

[Figure 2 about here.]

In the decision-making rounds, respondents made decisions about three different types of politicians separately. As shown in the instructions in Figure 2, respondents were asked

[2]The purpose of Figure 1 is not to analyze how two samples may perform differently. Rather, Figure 1 provides readers with a better picture of respondents' demographic distribution to infer the results' representativeness.

during the experiment to select their preferred candidates in the first round, their preferred prime ministers in the second round, and their preferred ministers in the third round. In each round, respondents were presented with six tasks. To minimize the potential bias created by the order in which the attributes were shown, the attributes were reordered randomly every two tasks. Following the instructions, respondents were presented with profiles of two candidates, two prime ministers, or two ministers on their screens in each round and were asked to select their preferred politician each time. Figure 3 features the sampled questions for each round.

[Figure 3 about here.]

Table 1 presents the attributes that were included in this experiment. To make sure that the treatments were sufficiently realistic to participants, several constraints were imposed in the rounds featuring preferred prime ministers and preferred ministers. Therefore, there were 90 total profiles in the first round, 1347 profiles in the second round, and 4047 profiles in the third round. Each profile had an equal chance of being assigned to the participant. Based on the pre-test experience, each participant was provided with a handout featuring an index (or an online index) of several potentially confusing terms—such as "plagiarism"—in case they had a hard time imagining those specific situations.[3]

[3]When the prime minister is from the Conservative Party, the minister cannot be from the Labour Party, and when the prime minister is from the Labour Party, the minister can only be from the same party.

5 The Effects of Political Scandals on Voters' Preferences towards Candidates

Figure 4 illustrates the effects of each attribute included in the study on voters' preferences towards candidates. The estimated average marginal component effects (AMCEs) reveal that, except for candidates' gender, all the other attributes affected candidates' chances of being preferred by the respondents. More specifically, the results are as follows. First, Figure 4 shows that respondents preferred Labour Party candidates to Conservative Party candidates. Second, respondents preferred candidates who support EU integration or are neutral on this issue to candidates who oppose EU integration. Finally, compared to candidates who are not involved in any scandals, respondents tended to not prefer candidates who are involved in scandals, regardless of the type of scandal.

Interpreting the results concretely, for example, the probability that voters will choose candidates who are not engaged in any scandals—as opposed to candidates involved in sexual harassment scandals—is almost 60%. As another example, the probability that voters will choose Labour candidates over Conservative candidates is approximately 10%. These data support the study's first hypothesis: voters do care about candidates' involvement in scandals. Regardless of the type of scandal, voters prefer "clean" candidates. This finding reconciles different conclusions that under a complex information system, voters rely highly on simple heuristics—such as scandals—to form their preferences, but that this does not prevent voters from also utilizing other more complicated resources, such as party affiliation or policy positions.

[Table 1 about here.]

In addition, Figure 4 shows that, on average, compared to the traditionally-considered primary dimension (focused on partisanship and/or policy positions), voters weigh this second dimension of valence/scandals more heavily. Given the study's conjoint experiment design, this result was not produced by voters being primed or framed by scandals. Rather, since all factors were presented to voters simultaneously, this result must be interpreted to conclude that, compared to other factors, scandals naturally attract greater attention.

[Figure 4 about here.]

However, Figure 5 shows that scandals' effects do not tend to vary conditionally based on candidates' attributes. Scandals' effects are actually stable across candidates' gender, partisanship, and positions on EU integration. In other words, "who the candidates are" does not interfere with how voters evaluate their valence performance. Thus, the evidence does not support the study's second hypothesis. Rather, the finding that scandals' effects are heterogeneous across participants' attributes validates the theory of motivated reasoning. Instead of reporting the coefficients, Figure 6 reports the marginal mean of each level of candidates' individual attributes conditioned by respondents' age, gender, education, party affiliation, and positions on EU integration separately.

[Figure 5 about here.]

To calculate the marginal mean, we first calculated the mean response of a given level of a given candidate attribute—for instance, *Female*—with a given combination of the rest of the attributes—for instance, *Conservative Party*, *Neutral*, and *No Scandals*. We then calculated the mean response of the same level of the same attribute but with a different combination.

Finally, we averaged the mean response of *Female* across different combinations. Note that a marginal mean value of less than 0.5 is equivalent to 0.0 of an estimated coefficient, so when a given coefficient's 95% bar covers 0.5 in Figure 6, it means that that coefficient is statistically insignificant.

Figure 6 demonstrates that scandals' effects are heterogeneous conditioned by respondents' age, party affiliation, and positions on EU integration. As Figure 6 shows, respondents in the 50-59 age range felt more negative about plagiarism compared to respondents in the 18-29 and 40-49 age ranges. Furthermore, respondents in the 50-59 age range felt more positive about extramarital affairs than respondents in the 60+ age range.

In addition, the effects of sexual harassment were different for Labour Party identifiers and Conservative Party identifiers. As Figure 6d illustrates, Labour Party identifiers were more negative about sexual harassment. Figure 6d also indicates that Green Party identifiers were more positive about extramarital affairs than all other respondents.

Lastly, Figure 6e shows that the effect of sexual harassment varies based on respondents' positions on EU integration. Note that the "neutral" category was recoded to include participants who slightly support EU integration and who slightly oppose EU integration in the original survey. As presented, respondents who strongly oppose EU integration did not consider sexual harassment to be as negative as respondents who are neutral on EU integration. Thus, the third hypothesis is partially confirmed.

[Figure 6 about here.]

Although the results indicate that respondents in the 50-59 age group had different opin-

ions about several types of scandals than other respondents, no solid theories exist to explain why this is the case. Nevertheless, the effect of sexual harassment does vary as expected. Since both partisanship and stance on EU integration are highly correlated with ideology in the U.K., the results of Figure 6 are consistent with the argument of Graham, Haidt and Nosek (2009). In particular, given that the "#metoo" movement is generally supported by liberals—as van der Linden and Panagopoulos (2019) argue—we should expect that the negative effect of sexual harassment is bigger on liberal voters than conservative voters. This is precisely what Figure 6d and Figure 6e present: the effect of sexual harassment works oppositely between liberal and conservative participants.

As a validity check on the findings, it can be observed that in both Figure 6d and Figure 6e, the effects of candidates' party affiliation and positions on EU integration do vary based on participants' partisanship and stances on EU integration. This phenomenon is in line with the expectations. For instance, the Labour Party identifiers had more negative feelings towards candidates representing the Conservative Party than UKIP identifiers.

Finally, Figure 7 partially confirms the fourth hypothesis. Following the theory of motivated reasoning, when participants and candidates share the same values—such as co-partisanship or the same stances on EU integration—the magnitude of scandals' effects is compromised. As Figure 7b shows, Labour Party identifiers tended to downgrade Conservative Party candidates involved in sexual harassment scandals more than Labour Party candidates involved in such scandals. Furthermore, Figure 7c shows that if both candidates and voters support EU integration, the negative perception of plagiarism is diminished. This finding partially aligns with prior literature arguing that when politicians and voters share common values, the negative effects of scandals that are contrary to voters' predispositions are compromised. Nevertheless, unlike in previous studies, the present study's results demonstrate that such effects do not always vanish.

[Figure 7 about here.]

6 Do Scandals' Effects Spill Over within the Cabinet?

As suggested by prior literature and demonstrated by the results presented above, voters tend to rely on relatively simple and low-cost information to form their perceptions of political candidates. This is also the case when voters update their perceptions of politicians' and/or parties' ideologies. Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) illustrate that, rather than tracking actual policy-making behavior, voters can simply use the overall composition of a cabinet as heuristics to update themselves on parties' ideological positions. For instance, parties in a coalition government are considered to be ideologically similar to non-coalition parties.

Fortunato and Adams (2015) further show that, in addition to ideology, voters utilize the policy positions of the prime minister to update their perceptions of junior coalition partners' positions. Furthermore, Duch, Przepiorka and Stevenson (2015) argue that voters attribute almost all policy accountability to the prime minister's party, even under the case of a coalition government. Overall, these studies imply that voters tend to consider a cabinet as a unity, even if it is coalitional. If this is the case for the dimension of policy, it should also hold true for the dimension of valence. More specifically, when voters observe the involvement of one cabinet member—either the prime minister or any other minister—in a scandal, they will downgrade their moral perception of other cabinet members. In other words, given that voters do not merely blame the specific cabinet member who is involved in a scandal but rather blame the whole group, I expect that the negative effects of political scandals will spill over to voters' perceptions of other cabinet members.

Therefore, if voters use scandals to evaluate individual politicians, as demonstrated above, it is expected that they will also use similar sources of information to evaluate a cabinet. Once an individual member within the cabinet is revealed to be involved in a scandal, voters are expected to downgrade their evaluation of the rest of the cabinet members, regardless of whether they are related to the scandal or not. Thus, the final hypothesis is:

H 5 *When the prime minister is involved in political scandals, this will negatively affect voters' preferences toward her ministers, and* vice versa.

Evidence from Figure 8 affirms the last hypothesis. Both Figure 8a and Figure 8b show that scandals' negative impact can be transmitted to, or spill over onto, politicians in the same cabinet. More precisely, when a prime minister is involved in a scandal, this causes voters to downgrade their evaluation of her ministers, and vice versa. In other words, this study demonstrates that when one cabinet member is involved in a scandal, voters tend to attribute this event to the whole cabinet. Furthermore, as Figure 8cand Figure 8d present, whether the cabinet is uniform or coalitional makes no significant difference in scandals' spill-over effect. This finding contributes to the literature by revealing that, in addition to ideology and policy, voters often consider individual cabinet members' scandal involvement to update their valence perception of the whole cabinet.

As a validity check of the results, it can be seen that the estimated effects of other attributes are consistent across different rounds as well. Such consistency demonstrates the robustness of this project's design.

7 Discussion

This study's findings confirm that, even under a complicated information environment, voters use political scandals to inform themselves in order to make political judgments. Among the types of political scandals included in this study, sexual harassment and misreporting funds were proven to have the biggest impact. Indeed, the findings herein show that voters rely on the heuristic of political scandals to inform their preferences of individual politicians and that they prefer "clean" politicians—that is, politicians not involved in any scandals. The causal results presented here reveal that, on average, political scandals lower citizen evaluations of individual politicians independent of other salient predictors of politician evaluation such as ideological and partisan preferences.

[Figure 8 about here.]

By adopting a conjoint experiment design, this paper extends the literature in this field to simultaneously comparing scandals with other significant factors, such as party affiliation and positions on EU integration. Contrary to traditional approaches, which usually treat ideology as the primary dimension that affects voters' political evaluations, this study suggests that the so-called valence dimension, which is usually considered as a secondary dimension, is much more impactful than previously understood. Thus, the implication is that when applying the spatial model or estimating individuals' ideal points, the single-dimension assumption may not be valid and researchers must at least include the valence dimension. Theoretically, this paper contributes to existing research by confirming Converse's (2006) argument that voters are mainly concerned with simple heuristics.

However, this does not mean that voters make decisions randomly. Rather, the suggestion is that when simple information is available, voters give the most weight to political

scandals. Out of all the factors included in the study, a politician's involvement (or lack of involvement) in a scandal affects voters' preferences the most. The findings also show that voters do not reject complicated information completely; i.e., voters *do* use policy positions as heuristics as well, but they weigh them more lightly. Overall, the results reaffirm that not only do voters evaluate politicians multi-dimensionally, as suggested by the theory of valence issues, but they also further demonstrate that these non-ideological dimensions highly impact voters' choices. This second finding has been rarely argued in the literature, and never in such a well-supported manner.

Furthermore, the results suggest that scandals' negative effects are heterogeneous, as has been argued in the literature. Nevertheless, the effects are conditional only on voters' and not on candidates' attributes, which is consistent with the theory stating that citizens with different ideologies interpret scandals differently (Graham, Haidt and Nosek 2009; van der Linden and Panagopoulos 2019). Beyond this, the findings also reaffirm the theory of motivated reasoning, which argues that voters tend to "tune down" the negativity of events that contradict their pre-existing preferences or predispositions. Thus, this indicates that the effects of political scandals are lessened when candidates and voters share common values or ideas, such as co-partisanship or the same policy positions.

Nevertheless, unlike previous studies showing that such value-sharing completely eliminates the effects of negative information due to motivated reasoning, the present study suggests that the effects are reduced but do not vanish. In other words, voters still downgrade politicians who are involved in political scandals even though they share the same values, but this common ground does compromise the strength of the negative effects.

A clear example of this is the 2017 United States Senate special election in Alabama. During this election, Republican candidate Roy Moore was alleged to have engaged in sexual

misconduct. In the end, Moore lost the election, but the difference in vote share between the winner and the loser was only about 1.7%. This outcome clearly illustrates this paper's conclusions. Not taking into account the heterogeneity of the effect of sexual harassment, one would "naively" consider Doug Jones to have won by a significant margin over Roy Moore. However, since we know that such negative effects are significantly reduced by co-partisanship, the difference in expected vote share should actually be significantly smaller than the "naive" expectation posited above. Furthermore, given that sexual harassment is considered by many to be a left-wing movement, as supported by the theory and data presented earlier, it should be unsurprising that the impact of this sexual scandal was discounted by Roy Moore's conservative supporters. Therefore, since the expected negative impact of a sexual harassment scandal is downgraded, this example's minute 1.7% difference in vote share should be easily anticipated. This particular electoral outcome underscores the claim that, in general, voters prefer candidates who are not involved in scandals, but that the magnitude of scandals' actual impact on an election can vary due to specific circumstances and conditions.

Finally, this paper is the first to demonstrate that, in addition to using policy-related information, voters also evaluate the valence of all cabinet members as a whole rather than each member's valence individually. In other words, when an individual cabinet member is engaged in a political scandal, voters tend to discount the whole cabinet rather than evaluating each member separately. Moreover, the study's findings conclude that, unlike with policy-related values, the direction of the spill-over effect does not determine the effect's magnitude. Instead, the magnitude of the spill-over effect does not change by the direction—stated in other words, the difference is insignificant. The implication here is that voters consider a given cabinet as a whole in every aspect, at least in the dimensions of ideology and valence. Overall, this study's findings contribute to the existing literature and suggest that voters tend to consider the whole cabinet as a single entity rather than treating it as a collection of individual ministers.

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Table 1: A List of Featured Attributes and Levels by Rounds

	Attributes	**Levels**
Candidate	Gender	Female
		Male
	Party Affiliation	Conservative Party
		Labour Party
		Liberal Democrats
	Position on EU Integration	Support EU Integration
		Neutral
		Oppose EU Integration
	Scandal	No Scandal
		Having an Extramarital Affair
		Plagiarism
		Misreporting Funds
		Sexual Harassment
Prime Minister	Gender	Female
		Male
	Party Affiliation	Conservative Party
		Labour Party
	Position on EU Integration	Support EU Integration
		Neutral
		Oppose EU Integration
	Scandal	No Scandal
		Having an Extramarital Affair
		Plagiarism
		Misreporting Funds
		Sexual Harassment
	Party Affiliation (Minister)	Conservative Party
		Labour Party
		Liberal Democrats
	Scandal (Minister)	No Scandal
		Having an Extramarital Affair
		Plagiarism
		Misreporting Funds
		Sexual Harassment
Minister	Gender	Female
		Male
	Party Affiliation	Conservative Party
		Labour Party
		Liberal Democrats
	Position on EU Integration	Support EU Integration
		Neutral
		Oppose EU Integration
	Scandal	No Scandal
		Having an Extramarital Affair
		Plagiarism
		Misreporting Funds
		Sexual Harassment
	Party Affiliation (Prime Minister)	Conservative Party
		Labour Party
	Position on EU Integration (Prime Minister)	Support EU Integration
		Neutral
		Oppose EU Integration
	Scandal (Prime Minister)	No Scandal
		Having an Extramarital Affair
		Plagiarism
		Misreporting Funds
		Sexual Harassment

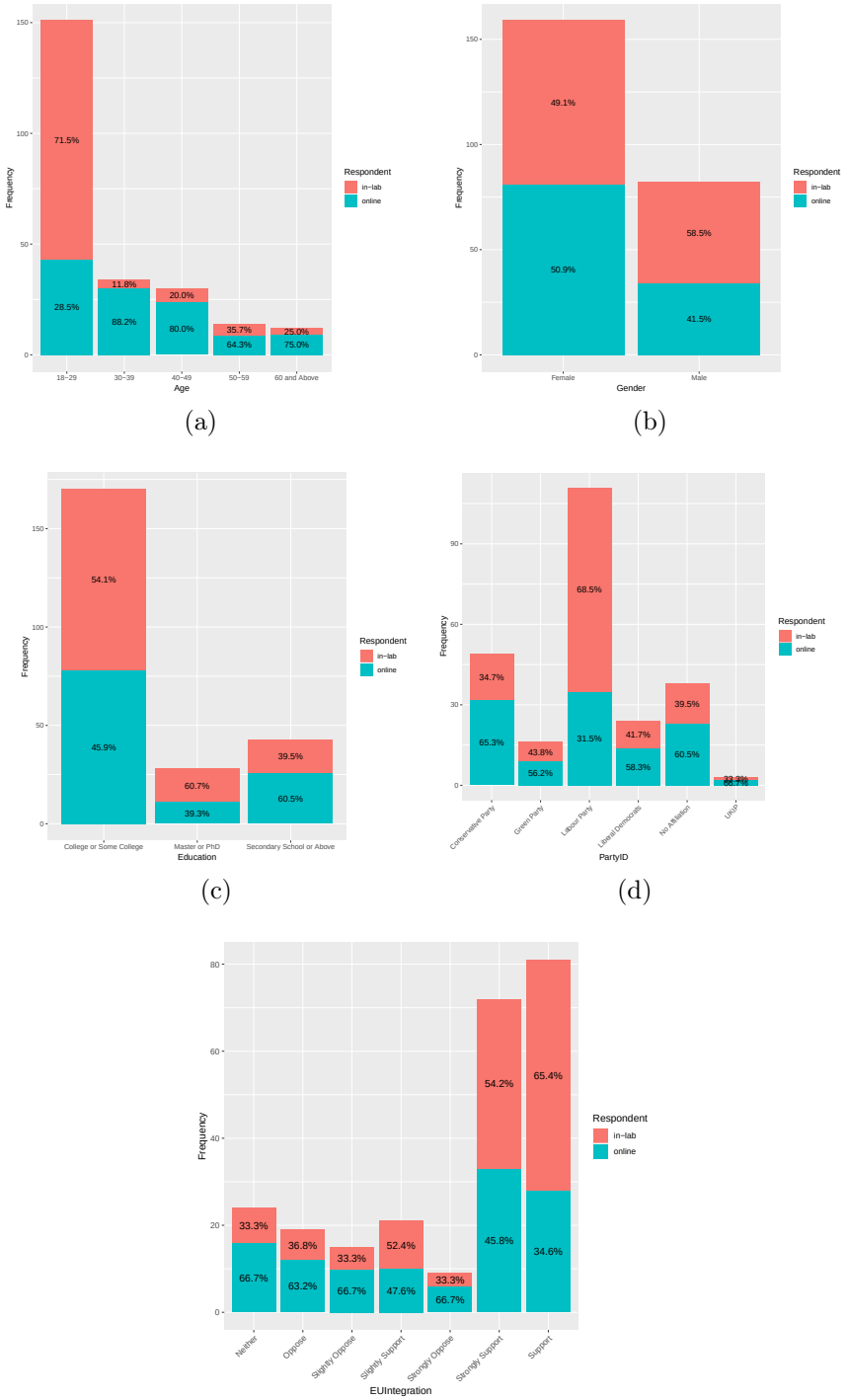


Figure 1: Distribution of In-lab and Online Respondents' Characteristics

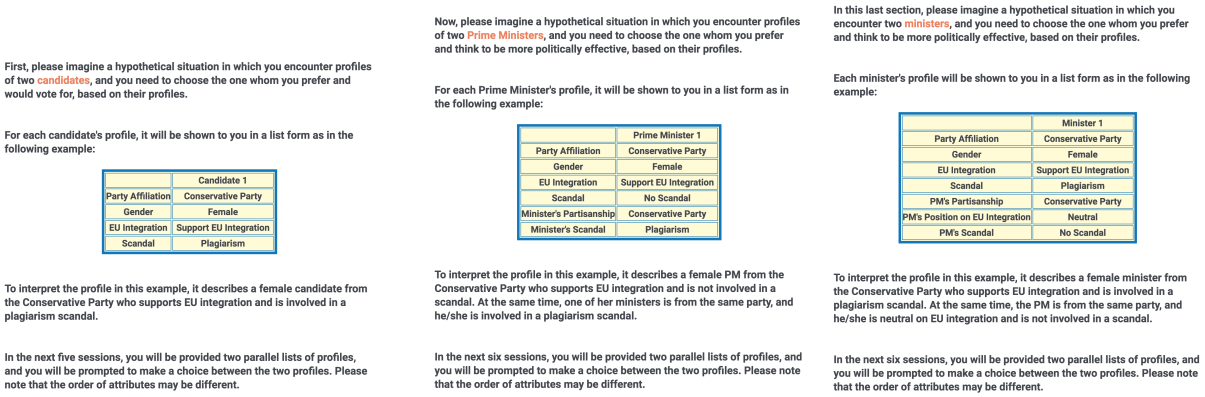
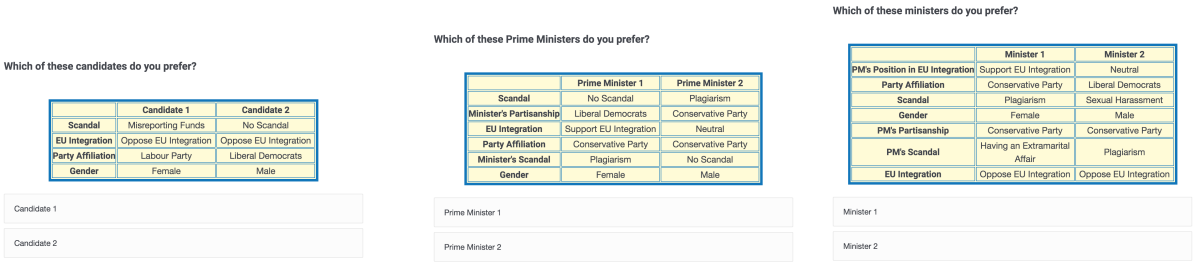


Figure 2: Instructions for Interpreting Profiles



(a) (b) (c)

Figure 3: Sample Questions

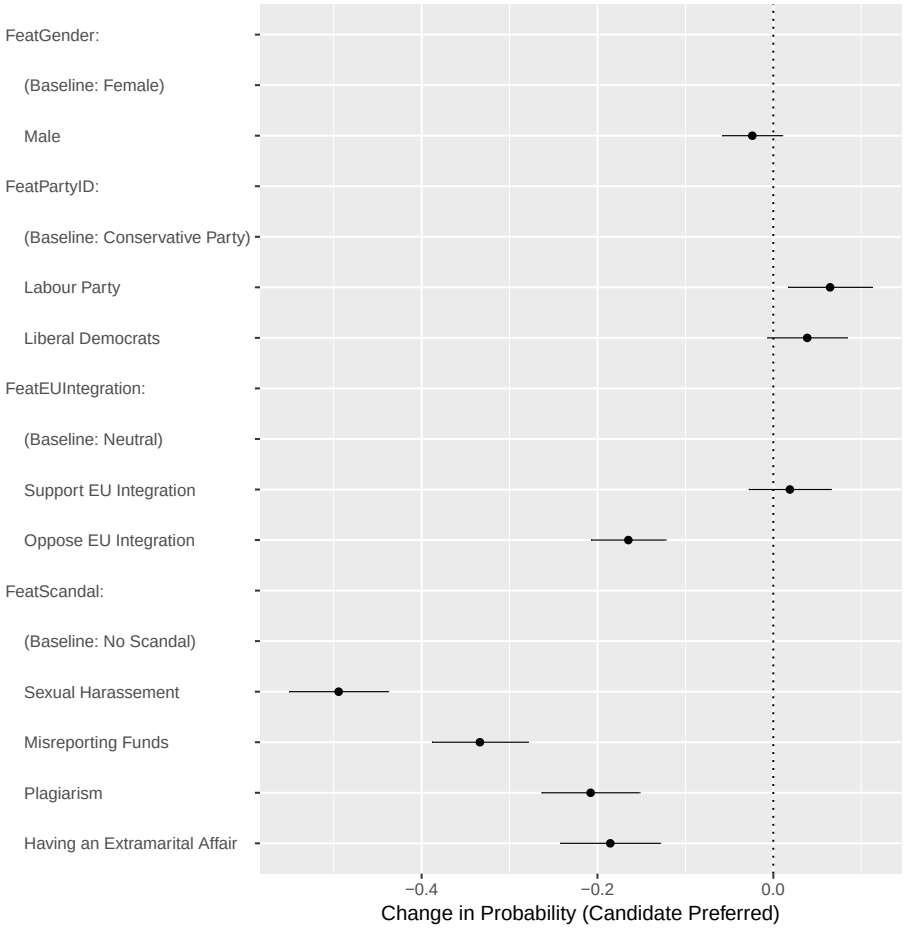
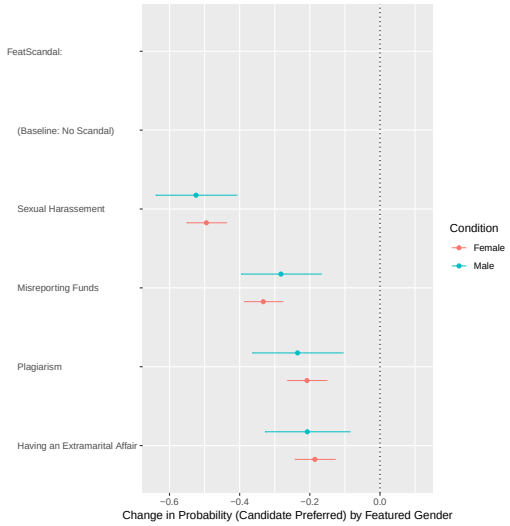


Figure 4: The Average Effect of Candidates' Individual Attributes



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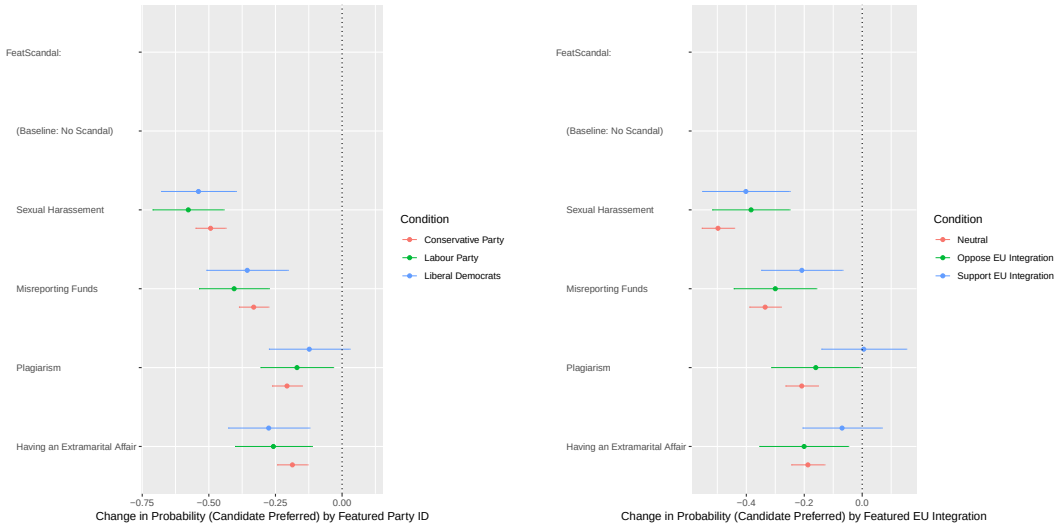

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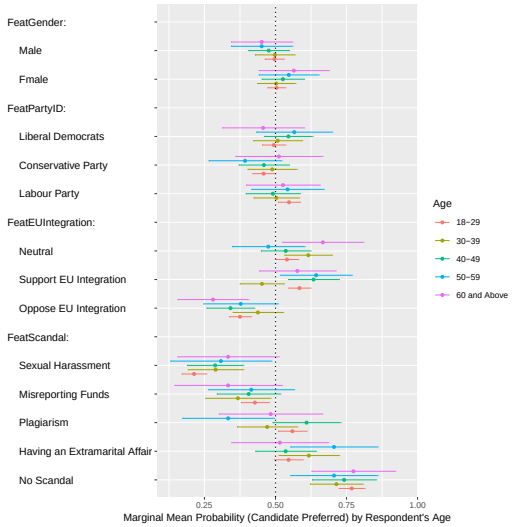
Figure 5: Effects of Scandals Conditional on Candidates' Attributes



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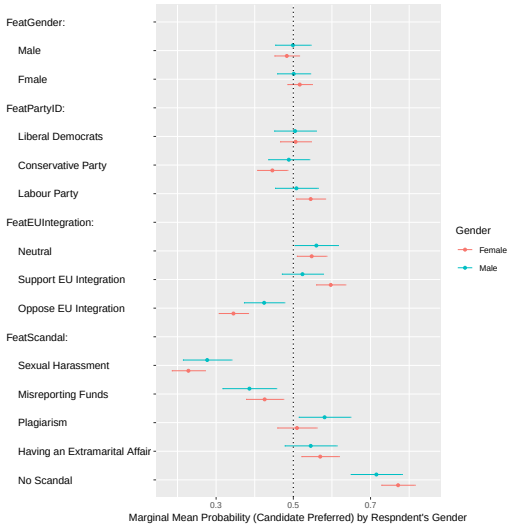

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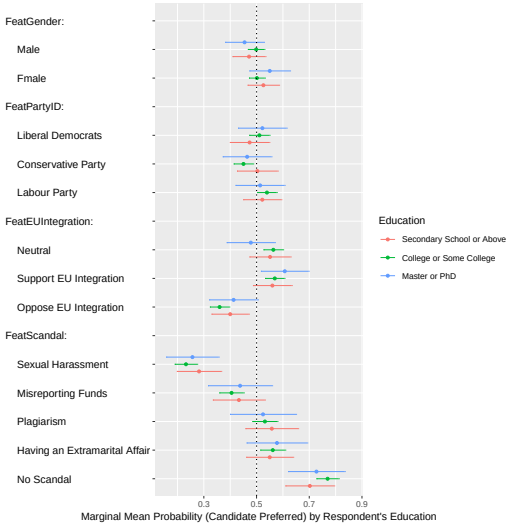

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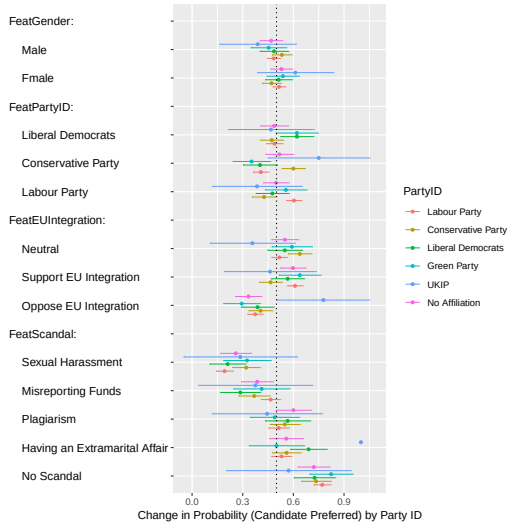

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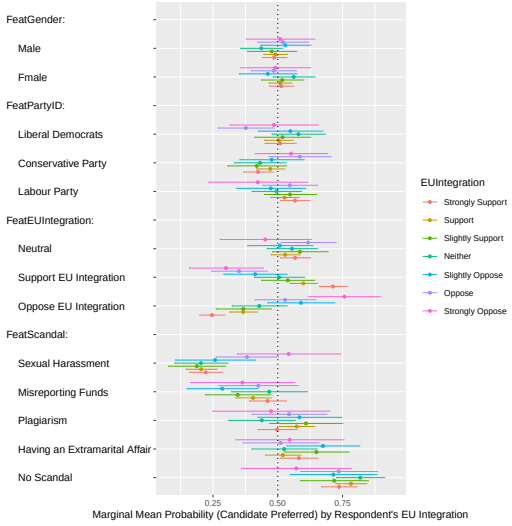

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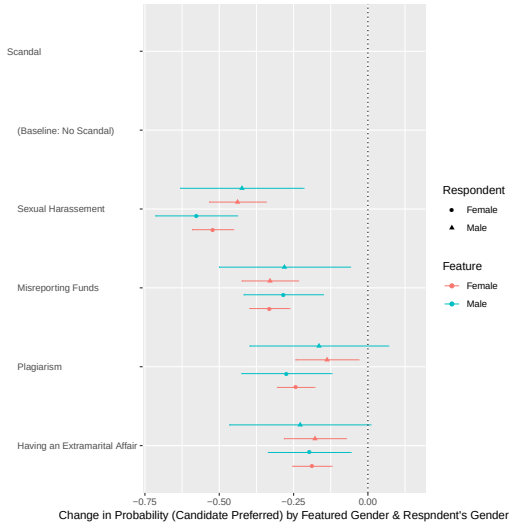
Figure 6: Effects of Scandals Conditional on Candidates' Attributes



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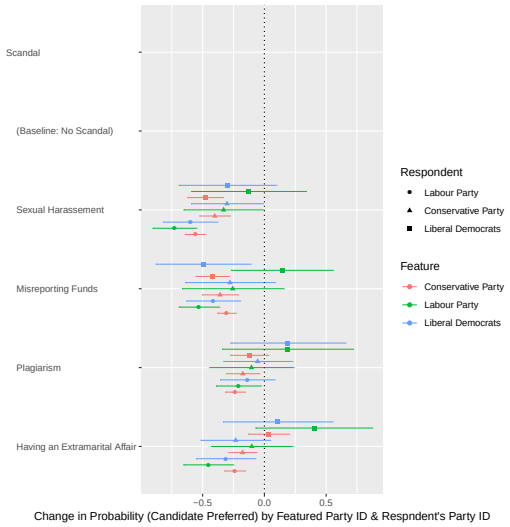

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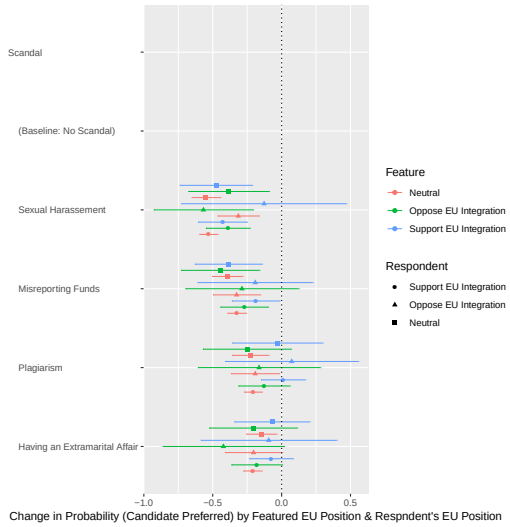

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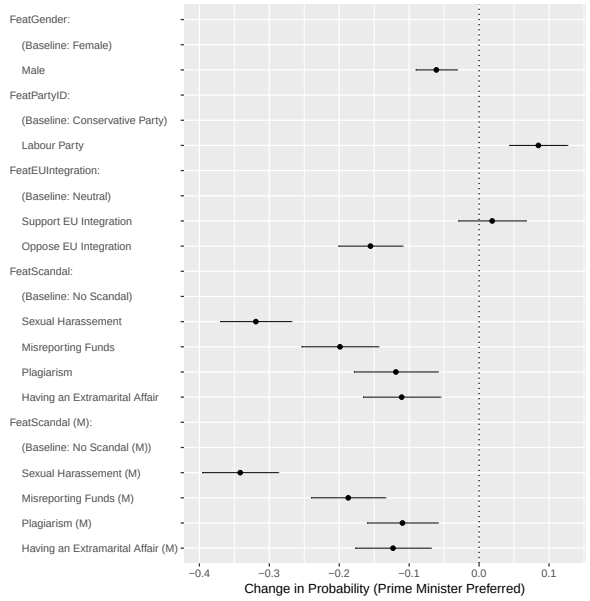
Figure 7: Effects of Scandals Conditioning on Common Attributes



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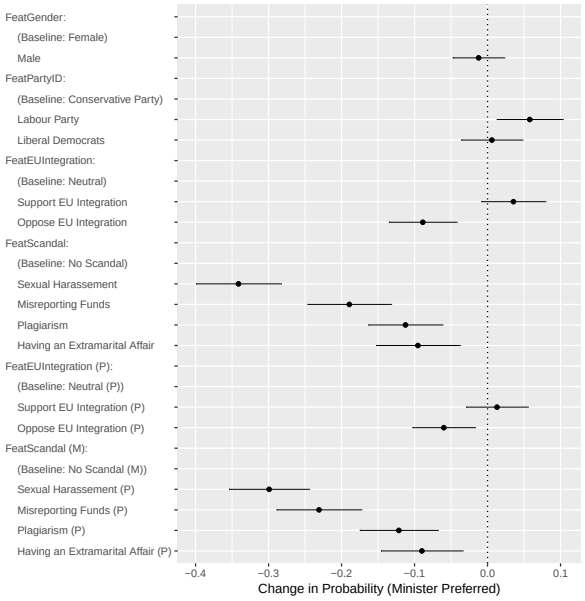

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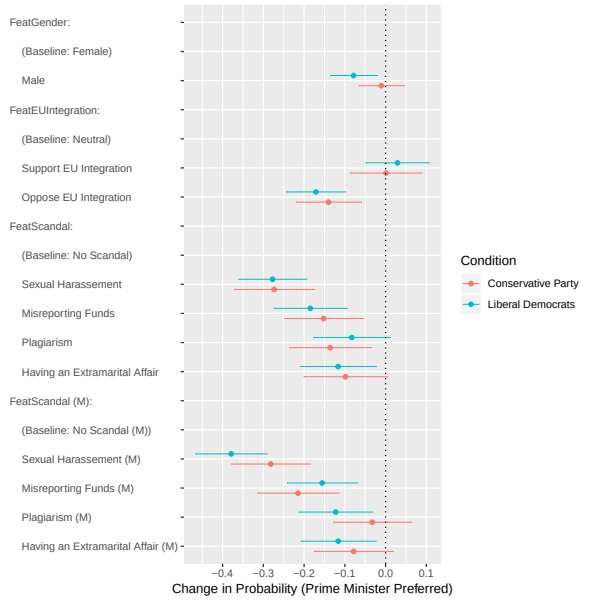

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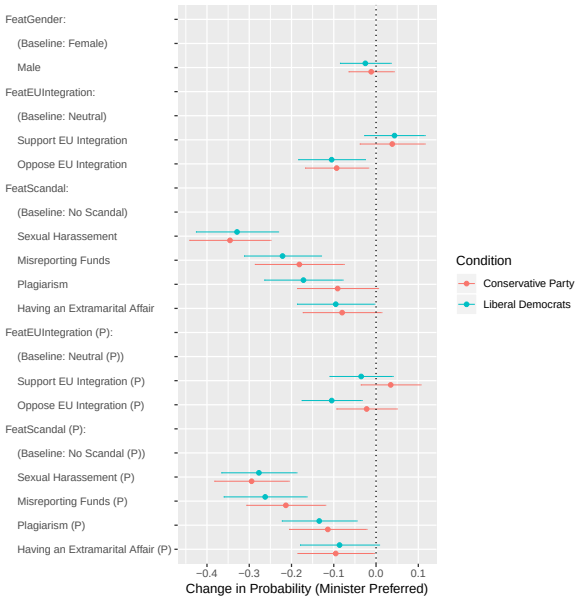

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Figure 8: The Average Effect of Each of the Prime Ministers' and the Ministers' Attributes