

## Populists and Political Scandals: Kiss of Death or Elixir of Life

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*Abstract:* Ethno-populists often come to power criticizing the establishment for being plagued by corruption but after assuming office, the ethno-populists themselves frequently become implicated in corruption and other scandals. We use an original scandal-event dataset compiled from traditional media sources from Hungary and Poland spanning the period of 2000 to 2022 and we find little evidence that ethno-populist incumbents have been hurt by the scandals exposing their wrongdoing. Instead, we document a significant, short-term rally effect among their supporters. Media pluralism, robust opposition, and a bad economy diminish this effect. In contrast, scandals implicating the opponents of ethno-populists boost support for these parties.

In 2023, former US President Donald Trump was indicted in three different federal and local cases, including rape and conspiring to subvert American democracy;<sup>3</sup> yet, his favorability with potential voters in the 2024 presidential election remained largely unchanged.<sup>4</sup> The ethno-populist Fidesz party came to power in Hungary in 2010 in the wake of the 2008 financial crash taking on an anti-establishment crusade against the Socialist government, which had been plagued by scandals. After assuming office, however, Fidesz itself became implicated in a number of scandals – from sex-and-drugs peccadillos to being accused of corruption to using spyware on opponents.<sup>5</sup> Did those scandals damage Fidesz’ reputation given the party’s rhetoric against the corrupt establishment? Fidesz and its leader Viktor Orban seem to have emerged from numerous scandals unscathed, winning by a landslide their fourth consecutive election in 2022. Empirical studies of how involvement in political scandals affects populists are, however, still lacking (Karv and Strandberg 2018; Herkman 2018).

In this paper, we seek to examine this understudied relationship between scandals and populism. We ask: How immune to political scandals are populist incumbents? Our empirical focus is the ethno-populist regimes in Poland and Hungary. Our study is based on an original scandal-event dataset compiled from traditional-media sources from 2000 to 2022.

We find little evidence that ethno-populist incumbents have been hurt by the scandals exposing their wrongdoing. Instead, we document a significant, if small and short-term, rally effect in support for them. Media pluralism and a robust opposition diminish this effect; so does an underperforming economy. Scandals implicating the ethno-populist opponents boost their support. Populists seem to use a two-pronged strategy to immunize themselves against scandals. First, they lash out against mainstream media as part of a corrupt establishment, in order to discredit such media and thus delegitimize its reports of their wrongdoing. Second, ethno-populist incumbents also use their access to the state to smear their opponents in order to distract the citizenry from the ethno-populists’ own wrongdoing.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/08/07/trump-legal-web-00110037>

<sup>4</sup> <https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/polls/favorability/donald-trump/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/12/03/corruption-couldnt-shake-orbans-credibility-a-sex-scandal-just-might/>

We contribute to the literatures on executive scandals and on populism in three main ways. First, we study a group of executives – populists – who have been overlooked in that literature (Karv and Strandberg 2018; Herkman 2018) but who are anecdotally assumed to be particularly immune to scandals and to instead leverage them successfully to their political ends. We provide not just descriptive data to understand the phenomenon of ethno-populist scandals but also to conduct regression analysis to account for some of the main factors within each country that influence the role played by political scandals in the evolution of support for ethno-populist parties. Second, while their delegitimizing of media has been anticipated by the literature on populism, we document a second strategy – using the media to manufacture scandals – in order to distract the public from their own transgressions with scandals alleging wrongdoing by their opponents. Third, we contribute to the literature on populism by examining a key driver of populist resilience in power – populists’ skirting accountability for wrongdoing.

### **Research Agenda**

Looking at anecdotal evidence, many populists – from Donald Trump to Silvio Berlusconi – and their parties seem immune to scandals (Evans 2018). How accountable for wrongdoing are populist incumbents? We examine the relationship between scandals and populism by studying support for the ethno-populist governing parties in Hungary (Fidesz) and in Poland (Law and Justice (PiS) as they have become posterchildren for contemporary populism in Europe and beyond (Grzymala-Busse 2017:1). While in many European countries ethno-populist parties have become increasingly competitive in key elections, only in a few have these parties been able to come to and remain in power (Grzymala-Busse 2017). Poland and Hungary are the only two European countries where ethno-populist parties have recently governed without coalition partners and could have thus been solely responsible in governance scandals. Hence, they provide a clear setting for our analysis, allowing us to examine their immunity to scandals.

We define “scandal” as a real or conjured transgression of norms, values, or moral codes that receives significant public attention in the media as scandalous (Thompson 2000; Allern & von Sikorski 2018). Scandals, therefore, include an action or event widely reported as morally or legally wrong and anticipated to cause general public outrage within the relevant political and cultural context. Scandals are negative (Newman 2002; Newman and Forchimes 2010) or popularity-diminishing events (Ostrom and Simon 1985; Ostrom and Smith 1992). They are further “specific, dramatic, and sharply focused” and “the object of extensive media coverage” (Newman 2002, p 788; Mueller 1973, p 209). Norm transgression usually becomes news in the process of the media’s revelation of the action or event. We thus also understand political scandals to be mediated events, which are not only reported on but also fueled by media activity.

We define populism in a widely accepted manner (Kaltwasser et al, 2017)—as a thin ideology that has anti-establishment but also moralist and monist elements: populists depict society as divided into two homogenous and antagonistic groups – the “pure” people and the “corrupt” elites – and claim exclusive representation of “the people” (Kaltwasser, 2014; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Hawkins, 2009; Hawkins et al., 2018). Populists are anti-establishment forces—they usually accuse the “elite” of being incompetent or corrupt (Canovan 2002; Barr 2009). For populists, this is a moralist distinction, given their juxtaposition of the immorality of the elite and the “purity,” “righteousness” or “goodness” of the people. Lastly,

populists' worldview is also a monist one as both "the people" and "the elite" are seen as homogenous groups sharing the same interests and values.

Ethno-populism is a form of populism in which nationalism is co-articulated with populism in a single ideology. Ethno-populists thus use nationalist symbols to mobilize the population against perceived foreign and/or domestic threats related to the ethnos or the Nation and adopt policies that skew the playing field toward members of the national in-group (Jenne; Vachudova 2020).

PiS and Fidesz have explicitly positioned the "(good ordinary) people" against the elites since the mid-2000s (Greskovits and Bohle YEAR; Grzymala-Busse 2017) and intertwined the defense of "the people" with the defense of the "Nation" (Jenne; Vachudova 2020). For example, Viktor Orban often contrasts the millions of Hungarians with national feeling on the one side to the "cosmopolitan elite" on the other side.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, PiS often contrasts "the Nation" as a morally upright community to the elite cartel ("*uklad*") of former Solidarity and former communist parties, which PiS claims was a self-serving, anti-Polish, western/liberal-communist-criminal mafia (Grzymala-Busse 2017).

### **Literature and Hypotheses**

Speaking to the competence and integrity of the government officials directly involved (Thompson 2000; Brenton, 2013; Maier 2011), scandals inform the public's perception of whether the current authorities can effectively govern while preventing serious wrongdoing (Maier 2011). Scandals thus shape trust in the government, the governing party, and state institutions more broadly (Bowler and Karp 2004; Della Porta 2000; Seligson 2002). Citizens generally expect politicians to act in the general interest of the public and to uphold high legal, social and moral standards; and despite some variation across politico-cultural contexts, politicians implicated in scandals are judged more harshly than their peers (Funk 1996; Carlson et al. 2000; Doherty et al. 2011; McDermott et al. 2015).

So what happens when ethno-populists who come to power on appeals against the corrupt establishment themselves become embroiled in political scandals? Many find that politicians 'saying one thing and doing the opposite' is usually perceived by the public as especially unpardonable (McDermott et al. 2015; Allen et al. 2016; von Sikorski & Herbst 2020; Rose and Wessels 2019). Accordingly, it could be expected that if scandals paint populists as corrupt themselves, they would be especially vulnerable to scandals since they claim to be a force for cleaner and better politics.

*H0: Populist incumbents would suffer a loss of support if they themselves become implicated in political scandals.*

Populists could alternatively be "immune" to scandals. In new democracies, voters have been found to knowingly cast ballots for corrupt politicians because voters expect the overall benefits from such politicians' term in office to be greater than the costs associated with their corruption (Winters and Weitz-Shapiro 2013). In addition, some scholars document that there has been a certain normalization of and social habituation or numbing to political scandals, namely an exponential rise in the number of scandals compared to earlier decades, coupled with a drop in

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<sup>6</sup> Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, National Day address.

the rate of resignations and dismissals of implicated political officials following scandals (Pollack et al 2018). In some instances, embattled incumbents' approval ratings have reached some of their highest levels at the time when the incumbent was repeatedly under intensive questioning for their role in a high-profile scandal (Shah, Watts, Domke, & Fan, 2002 on former U.S. President Bill Clinton for his role in the so-called Clinton–Lewinsky scandal).

Moreover, populists often blame the “corrupt political establishment,” including their opponents and traditional mainstream media, for continuously trying to derail the populist project. Populists have frequently claimed that mainstream media is the mouthpiece of the ruling class and some have found that such media ignore populists at first and then respond to their insurgency ‘by adopting tones of outrage and ridicule’ (Mazzoleni 2008: 61).<sup>7</sup> Their supporters could thus perceive media scandal reports to be part of such an establishment ploy to sabotage populist incumbents. As a result, political scandals implicating governing populists could have little impact on support for populist incumbents.

By often displaying intentionally provocative behavior, populist politicians neither behave in the same manner as politicians from mainstream parties, nor are they expected to do so by the public, their opponents, or the media (Herkman 2018).<sup>8</sup> As a result, populists' political rhetoric and strategies challenge previously and widely held assumptions regarding the relationship between norm transgression and its expected negative impact on incumbents implicated in political scandals.

In fact, populist incumbents could even benefit from such scandals. Some have argued that scandalous populist behavior is often seen as part of their ‘typical’ political repertoire (Karv and Strandberg 2018). Others find that populists continuously shift the standard for what is considered acceptable behavior for officeholders (Skonieczny 2021). Provocation and norm transgressions are essential to the populist rhetoric and have been generally exploited at public rallies and to attract media attention (Mazzoleni, 2008: 55–57; Muller, 2016). Wodak (2013: 32–33) describes a dynamic in which right-wing populists can ‘set the agenda and distract the media from other important news’ with their public provocations and norm violations. Herkman (2018) further documents that provocation and playing the role of the underdog are common strategies employed by populists implicated in moral scandals in the Nordic countries.

Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

*H1: Populist incumbents can be “immune” to or even benefit from being implicated in political scandal reports.*

At the same time, since populists postulate a “corrupt political elite” as a core characteristic of the political system, it could be expected that political scandals implicating “the establishment,” that is, non-populist politicians would boost populist mobilization and support. For example, Wodak (2013) analyzed the communication strategy of Austria’s ethno-populist FPO party and

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<sup>7</sup> Yet, the established news media are by no means immune to showing deference to populist parties (Mazzoleni, 2008) or to paving the way for the normalization of populist agendas on, for example, topics such as immigration and crime (Hall et al., 2013).

<sup>8</sup> According to some the pursuit of media coverage and the communication of rage are no longer incidental but essential to the growth of reactionary populisms (Freedman 2018).

found that its office-seeking politicians can set the agenda by exploiting political scandals implicating their opponents.

Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

*H2: Political scandals implicating populist opponents boost populist mobilization and support.*

It should be noted, however, that there's significant literature that documents that the extent to which incumbents are held responsible for political scandals is conditional: for instance, scandals have been found to harm government approval less, if at all, when the economy is strong than when it is weak (Carlin et al YEAR on Latin America, Winters and Weitz-Shapiro 2013 on Brazil, Newmark et al 2019 in the US, and Kauder and Potrafke 2015 on Germany).<sup>9</sup>

Accordingly, we hypothesize that:

*H3: As with other incumbents more broadly, populists' accountability for scandals implicating them might be conditional on their performance in office, especially in managing their country's economy.*

## **Research Design**

To study how scandals have affected the ethno-populist Fidesz and PiS, we compiled an original scandal-event dataset. For scandals to affect public opinion they must be publicized, so we based our analysis on events prominently reported in the press. Using Lexis Nexis, we searched for and identified all minor and major scandals in Hungary and Poland, implicating political figures reported to have engaged in wrongdoing from 2000 to 2022, as reported by domestic and international traditional media. Since political scandals are important signals about the integrity and competence of the implicated government officials (Thompson 2000; Brenton, 2013; Maier 2011; Carlin et al YEAR), we track integrity and competence norm violations, including:

- *Incompetence*: violations of cultural expectations for professional conduct and expertise;
- *Moral transgressions*: violations of cultural expectations for personal conduct;
- *Corruption*: abuse of a political position for personal financial gain;
- *Power abuse*: abuse of a political position for personal, group, or institutional political gain, including clientelism and political process violations.

We did not distinguish and separately classify scandalous “talk” and scandalous “behavior” or illegality and violations of political and cultural expectations. For each political scandal, we recorded the date of the first and the last media report on the scandal. We further hand-coded which political figure(s) these scandals implicated and the nature of their transgression.

We measure scandal immunity and accountability for wrongdoing using the Executive Approval data of Carlin et al (2023). Following the broader literature on scandals and executive approval (Carlin et al YEAR), we consider support for ethno-populist parties and executive approval as a good proxy for the accountability of ethno-populist incumbents between elections, since their political survival may depend on it. The Executive Approval Database collected information on monthly executive approval in Poland and Hungary. We use the data starting in 2000 until October 2021 for Hungary and January 2022 for Poland.

We provide not just descriptive scandals data but also conduct regression analysis to account for the main country-level factors that influence the role played by political scandals in the evolution of support for ethno-populist parties. We include three political control variables: 1) scandal timing in the electoral cycle, 2) media pluralism, and 3) opposition strength.

First, we account for the electoral cycle, and in particular, the possibility that upcoming elections might influence the impact of political scandals. We speculate that political scandals might be most impactful in the run-up to an election when citizens are evaluating the performance of and can punish ethno-populist incumbents. Accordingly, we created a dummy variable noting whether there will be a national election within the next three months.<sup>10</sup>

Second, weakly institutionalized party systems and a less-than-free press that characterize many newer democracies deprive citizens of the necessary capacity and information (Duch 2001; Keefer 2007; Stokes 2001) to hold elected officials accountable. Some have found that presidential scandals in Latin America tend to snowball and thanks to strategic action by some press undermine executive popularity (Perez-Linan 2007). Controlling the (public and even national) media has been a critical element of the ethno-populist incumbent playbook. Yet, if they succeed in these efforts, ethno-populist incumbents are also likely to suppress unfavorable reports and scandal allegations, possibly undermining the media's efforts to keep them accountable for wrongdoing. Using data from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Project (Coppedge et al 2022), we also include a measure for media pluralism to control for the diversity of views present in Hungarian and Polish media as well as to take into account the evolution of the media landscapes over the course of the tenure of ethno-populists in these countries. We employ the question "Do the major print and broadcast media represent a wide range of political perspectives?" This expert-coded question is measured as a 0 if "The major media represent only the government's perspective" up to 3 when "All media perspectives that are important in this society are represented in at least one of the major media."

A strong opposition could similarly help draw attention to and demand that ethno-populist incumbents be accountable for their wrongdoing. The third political control we include measures how constrained ethno-populist incumbents have been, using the low to high (0-1) V-Dem variable that measures the extent to which the legislature and other government agencies are capable of questioning, investigating, and exercising oversight over the executive.

Lastly, it is commonly assumed that economic performance is a, if not the, central criterion on which citizens evaluate incumbents (Carlin et al 2019). In terms of economic controls, we use the quarterly GDP growth rate compared to the same period in the previous year as collected by the OECD. We also include the registered unemployment level in millions of persons in each country at a monthly level; this seasonally adjusted variable was provided by the Federal Reserve Economic Data.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Unlike the US political system where national political campaigns start earlier and earlier each election cycle, in Europe we see a shorter campaigning season.

<sup>11</sup> <https://fred.stlouisfed.org> We included unemployment, rather than inflation, because while hyperinflation was a concern in some post-communist countries in the 1990s, for the past twenty years, citizens and the governments of the region have focused mostly on the ability of politicians to bring or keep jobs in the region.

## Findings

### *Scandals Landscape*

There were 47 national political scandals in Hungary between 2000 and 2022 and 75 in Poland in the same time period. Moreover, the average number of new political scandals per year in both countries grew over time in this period and especially during the ethno-populists' reign to a peak of 14 new scandals in Poland in the election 2019 year and of 10 new scandals in Hungary in the same year.<sup>12</sup> Figures 1 and 2 present the number of new scandals in Hungary and in Poland for each month-year, distinguishing the scandals implicating PiS/ Fidesz (blue bars) and their opponents (red bars); green and black vertical lines mark presidential and parliamentary elections in each country; and on the top section of each graph, we include gray blocks, marking the time periods when ethno-populist parties were in power.

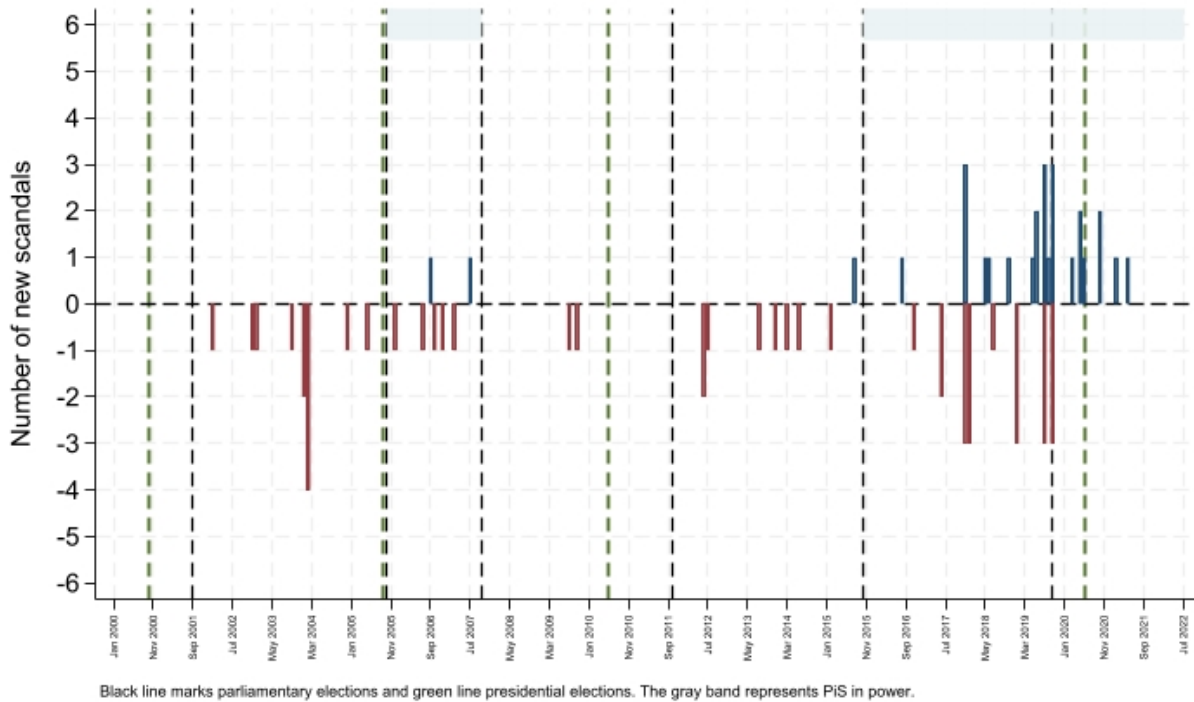


Figure 1: Chronology of scandals in Poland by implicated political party

<sup>12</sup> Moreover, norm transgressions varied between the two countries and over time, indicating some contextual differences in political and cultural norms. Corruption (usually for personal financial gain), however, was common in both countries and consistently present over time. In Poland, corruption dominates the scandal spectrum, whereas in Hungary, there is a more even distribution between scandals involving moral transgressions and power abuse (which could be a result of country-specific political and cultural norms or of Fidesz' longer tenure in office). Studying the types of ethno-populist scandals in Poland and Hungary and their impact is beyond the scope of this paper but is the focus of another study we have in progress (Petrova and Ganga 2022).

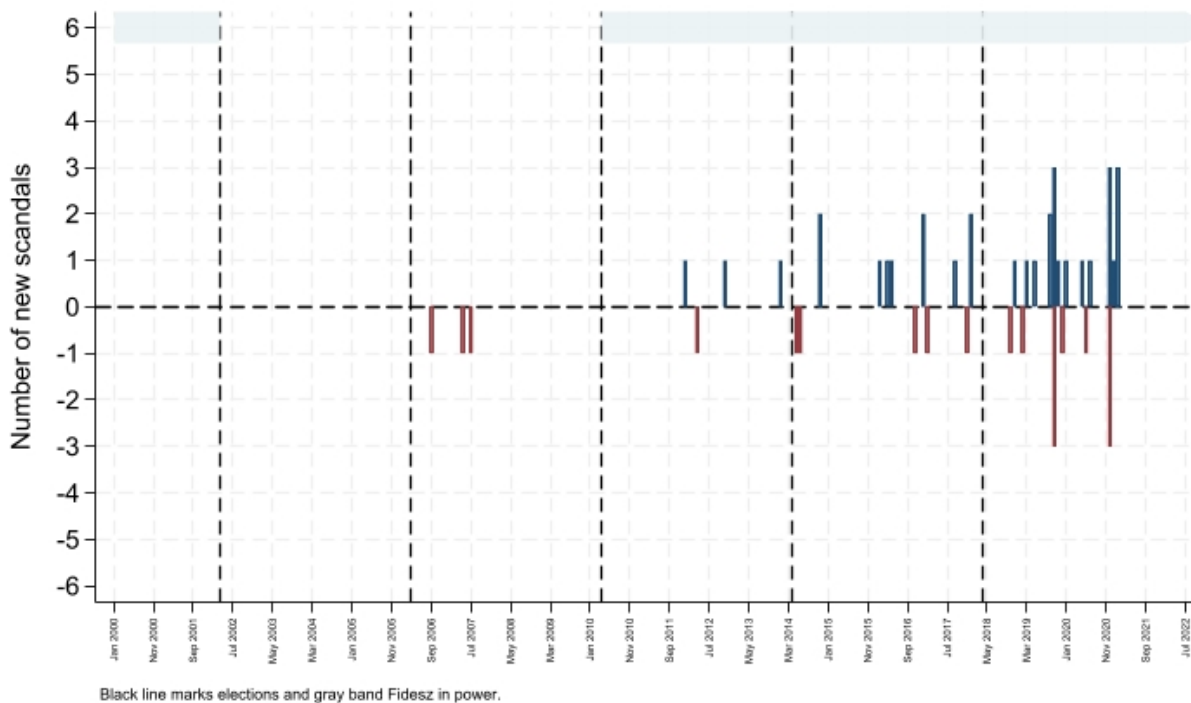


Figure 2: Chronology of scandals in Hungary by implicated political party

We note that ethno-populists in both countries came to power (for the first time) untarnished and in the wake of big scandals implicating (former) non-populist incumbents. Both parties used those scandals to campaign by protesting the malaise caused by their country’s corrupt political elite. Fidesz assumed office in 2010 while Hungary was still reeling from two scandals implicating the previous socialist incumbents. The first socialist Prime Minister, Peter Medgyessy, was accused by Fidesz’ leader Viktor Orban of having won the 2002 elections with the help of ballot rigging; the confrontation spilled into the streets and shortly afterward, Medgyessy was exposed as having been a spy under the old communist regime and then forced out mid-term by his own colleagues. His successor, Ferenc Gyurcsany - a wealthy businessman - went on to win a second term for the socialists in 2006. Shortly after the vote, a tape was leaked to the press in which Gyurcsany told party loyalists that the government had “lied in the morning; lied in the evening” about the state of the government’s finances in order to retain power. The following weeks witnessed mass anti-government protests and some police brutality (tear gas and rubber bullets) against peaceful demonstrators and in 2009, Gyurcsany was eventually also ousted in another socialist party coup.

Similarly, in the years before PiS came to power for the first time in 2005, hardly a month passed without a revelation of a new corruption scandal involving current or former government officials.<sup>13</sup> A prominent example was Orlengate. In 2003, it was reported that Jan Kulczyk, Poland’s richest man and friend to then-President Aleksander Kwasniewski, acting with Kwasniewski’s blessing, met with a former Russian spy to negotiate the sale of an important oil refinery to a Moscow-controlled corporation; this was argued by the opposition, including PiS, to

<sup>13</sup> Nations in Transit: Poland, 2005.

be a threat to the economic and security interests of the Polish state. PiS also came to power again in 2015, on the heels of Watergate - leaked tapes of politicians and businessmen (mostly associated with the then ruling liberal Civic Platform party) having lavish dinners, funded by taxpayers' money. Their dinner conversations underscored the close ties between businesses and politicians and while none revealed illegal actions, they illustrated the arrogance and questionable ethics of the ruling Civic Platform class. For example, one recording has Poland's top banker Marek Belka hinting he would be willing to help the Civic Platform government by easing monetary policy if there is an economic downturn ahead of the next parliamentary elections, even though under Polish law, the central bank must remain independent of politics. Another recording documents the obscene language that then Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski uses about Poland's close allies, the US and the UK.<sup>14</sup>

Such scandals allowed both Fidesz and PiS to argue that an "old-new elite" alliance of former communist and post-communist liberal forces had monopolized political, economic, and cultural power in their countries since 1989. Both Fidesz and PiS accordingly sought to undo – what Orban has referred to as –state "occupation" or "colonization," and to replace this "bad" establishment with a "good" elite, allegedly representing the interests of "the Nation" – a reconstruction of these countries' elites argued by Fidesz and PiS to be necessary to complete the "unfinished" post-1989 transitions in Hungary and Poland (Stanley 2019).

	Scandals implicating		Total scandals <sup>15</sup>
	Fidesz	Other political parties	
Fidesz in government	30	12	44
Yearly average	2.31	0.92	3.38
Fidesz in opposition	0	3	3
Yearly average	0	0.27	0.27
Total	30	3	47

*Table 1: Scandals by implicated party and governing regime in Hungary*

	Scandals implicating		Total scandals <sup>16</sup>
	PiS	Other political parties	
PiS in government	21	18	47
Yearly average	2.1	1.9	4.8
PiS in opposition	2	19	28
Yearly average	0.15	1.38	2.07
Total	23	37	75

*Table 2: Scandals by implicated party and governing regime in Poland*

<sup>14</sup> <https://euobserver.com/eu-political/129102>

<sup>15</sup> This column reports all recorded scandals, even those that do not involve a political party. This is why the rows will not add up to the total number of scandals.

<sup>16</sup> This column reports all recorded scandals, even those that do not involve a political party. This is why the rows will not add up to the total number of scandals.

When Fidesz and PiS assumed office, both became quickly and deeply implicated in scandals. The average annual number of scandals involving the ethno-populists – 2.1 in Poland and 2.31 in Hungary— increased from the 1.38 average annual scandals experienced by the previous non-populist incumbents in Poland and the 0.27 average annual scandals experienced by the previous non-populist incumbents in Hungary (See Tables 1 & 2).

Just as noteworthy, however, is the fact that since PiS and Fidesz have assumed power, the average annual number of scandals implicating their opponents (who were no longer in the spotlight) did not go down but instead grew over time. Since Fidesz assumed power in 2010, there have been an average of 2.31 scandals/year implicating Fidesz but also an average of 0.92 scandals/year implicating the weak fragmented Fidesz opposition. Similarly, since PiS returned to power in 2015, there have been an average of 2.1 scandals/year implicating PiS as well as an average of 1.9 scandals/year implicating non-PiS parties and politicians.<sup>17</sup> (Please refer to Tables 1 and 2).

We surmise that while in office, both Fidesz and PiS have likely used their access to the resources of the state (especially public media and prosecution) to undermine their opponents, including by manufacturing scandals. We have no direct evidence but find anecdotal support for this idea. For example, in 2019, a scandal erupted in the city of Inowrocław in central Poland, where public money from the PiS-controlled City Hall treasury was reportedly used to pay for online attacks on opposition politicians.<sup>18</sup> Again in 2019, a Senate hearing was held about the PiS government's alleged use of the Pegasus spyware against the opposition. According to experts, the phone of MP Krzysztof Brejza was attacked 33 times in 2019, during a period when the politician was coordinating the electoral campaign of the biggest opposition force in Poland, the Civic Coalition.<sup>19</sup>

While we have no direct evidence, there's anecdotal support pointing to the facts that Fidesz and PiS have sought to actively expose the past and current political malaise potentially attributable to these elites and even manufacture political scandals to not only continue mobilizing their base on anti-establishment grounds but also to distract from the mounting scandals exposing their own wrongdoing while in power. For instance, in 2019, in Poland, it was the politicized-by-PiS "state media [... that] dug up old dirt on [Civic Platform...] lawmaker Krzysztof Brejza, who heads the party's electoral campaign; [...] state media resurfaced the two-year-old [alleged hate speech PO] scandal just when the PiS party was caught up in hate speech allegations against the deputy justice minister."<sup>20</sup>

Similarly, there have been examples of Fidesz successfully going after its opponents: the up-and-coming opposition Budapest mayor, Gergely Karácsony, has come under fire on multiple

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<sup>17</sup> In comparison, while non-populist governments were in power, there were an average of 1.38 scandals/year implicating the incumbents and an average of 0.15 scandals/year implicating PiS's mid-2000's tenure in office that erupted after PiS had lost power. In Hungary, before 2010, there were no scandals about Fidesz, and all but one scandal involved the left incumbent (the exception scandal implicated the far-right Jobbik party).

<sup>18</sup> <https://tvpworld.com/44079345/investigation-into-opposition-politicians-using-public-money-to-fund-smear-campaign>

<sup>19</sup> <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/18/pegasus-spyware-scandal-escalates-raising-pressure-on-polish-government/>

<sup>20</sup> <https://gulfnnews.com/world/europe/sex-hotel-to-trash-talk-five-scandals-ahead-of-polands-general-election-1.1570708887578>

occasions. Most recently, in 2021, six opposition parties formed a coalition against Fidesz ahead of the 2022 national elections and Karácsony ran as the prime ministerial candidate of three of these parties at the time of their primary vote. Around the same time, the Fidesz-controlled Hungarian Office of Education opened an investigation into whether Karácsony met the requirements related to the language certificate required for his former appointment at Corvinus University. In addition, the Budapest chapter of Fidesz questioned Karácsony about the “undemocratically, unprofessionally and through back-door deals” his office allegedly brokered for the procurement of trams in Hungary’s capital.<sup>21</sup> A number of recordings – argued by some to have been doctored – were released along with allegations of corrupt real estate deals allegedly implicating Karácsony.<sup>22</sup> Public opinion surveys at that time indicate that 78 percent of active Budapest voters had heard about the scandals and 60 percent of those who had heard about the scandals thought that Karácsony is politically responsible.<sup>23</sup>

### ***Populist Accountability***

How accountable for wrongdoing are ethno-populist incumbents? We find little evidence that Fidesz and PiS have been hurt by scandals implicating them. Instead, they seem to have benefited from a significant, if small and short-term, rally effect in the wake of such scandals. We further find that scandals implicating ethno-populist opponents boost support for Fidesz and PiS.

To better understand the impact of scandals on support for ethno-populist incumbents we ran two sets of OLS regression models with robust standard errors. Our dependent variable is the executive party support measure described above and our main independent variable is the number of new scandals for each month-year from 2000-2022 with two different time lags. We consider support for the ethno-populist incumbents in the same quarter in which the scandal broke out (Q0) since the scandal is likely to be front-of-mind for most citizens at that time. In addition, since scandals might take time to change the public’s opinion and support for ethno-populist governments, we also consider support for the ethno-populist incumbents in a year’s time (Q4) when the scandal has likely played out and the public has had time to process all revelations and react to them in an informed manner.<sup>24</sup>

Tables 3 and 4 Here

Our findings confirm the hypothesis that populist incumbents might be “immune” to political scandals implicating them (H1). We report our examination of the impact of the number of new

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<sup>21</sup> <https://dailynewshungary.com/budapest-tram-purchase-scandal-mayor-gergely-karacsony-refutes-accusations/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://hungarytoday.hu/recording-budapest-city-hall-scandal-opposition-mayor-karacsony-charges/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://nezopont.hu/en/the-majority-of-budapest-residents-consider-gergely-karacsony-to-be-responsible-for-the-city-hall-affair/>

Earlier smear campaigns were less successful: in 2019, when Karácsony ran for mayor, a leaked audio recording allegedly had Karácsony talk about opposition chances, the corruption of local allied socialists, and threats to his family by the head of the Socialist Party’s 14th district chapter. The tape was challenged as having been edited together from recordings of several different meetings in the interest of Fidesz and its candidate for mayor of Budapest [<https://hungarytoday.hu/recording-of-karacsony-during-presidential-meeting-hungarian-watergate-says-party-co-leader/>]

<sup>24</sup> As a robustness check we also ran our analyses with support measured one quarter after the scandal (Q1). Our results stayed the same. See Appendix Tables A1-4.

scandals implicating the ethno-populist incumbents in Hungary and Poland respectively on political support for their parties in the short and long runs in Models 1 and 2 in Tables 3 and 4 respectively. Not only are the Hungarian and Polish publics not punishing Fidesz and PiS for alleged wrongdoing but are instead rallying around them in support. This rally effect is significant in the short-term. (The coefficient is positive and significant in our same-quarter models and still positive but smaller in size and insignificant in our year-end models.) In other words, while at first scandals implicating Fidesz and PiS seem to boost support for these parties, the impact of such scandals weakens one year after the scandals break out.

Our controls included three political and two economic variables: scandal timing in the electoral cycle, media pluralism, and opposition strength as well as GDP growth and unemployment (Models 3 and 4 in Tables 3 and 4). First, we expected political scandals to be more impactful in the run-up to an election as citizens scrutinize the performance of ethno-populist incumbents. Indeed, the elections coefficient is positive, if insignificant, for national elections are taking place in the same quarter as the scandal, suggesting that even as Fidesz scandals take place upcoming elections only boost the incumbent's advantage. Second, we expected that media pluralism contributes to ethno-populist incumbents being more accountable for wrongdoing. In Poland, the coefficient is negative and significant suggesting greater freedom of the media negatively impacts the government's approval rate. By contrast in Hungary, the media has a negative—though not statistically significant—impact in the short run but positive in the long run. This implies that in Hungary the media has been under a populist regime much longer thus dampening any effect media pluralism might have on government approval when Fidesz is implicated in scandals. In Poland, increases in media pluralism negatively impact government approval even when the populist incumbents are involved thus acting as a check on power. Third, we further expected that opposition strength will similarly contribute to ethno-populist incumbents being more accountable for wrongdoing. This control variable is positive and significant in Poland but positive and insignificant in Hungary, similarly suggesting that strong legislative constraints benefit the populist party. This might seem odd, but in the context of Fidesz and Law and Justice winning large parliamentary majorities, these constraints only seem to help them. Lastly, as expected, in both countries a rise in unemployment—an important voter issue—has a negative and statistically significant effect on government approval in the long run (Model 4 in Tables 3 and 4).<sup>25</sup>

#### Tables 5 and 6 Here

Another way to conceptualize the analysis is to include all years available but also add a dummy variable for an ethno-populist government and interact it with the number of new scandals. The findings suggest that total scandals generally impact government approval and the effect is positive and statistically significant in Hungary (Table 5), whereas in Poland the effect is more muted (Table 6). Panels a) and b) in Figure 3 display Models 4 in Tables 5 and 6. Overall, we can see that as more scandals are reported—regardless of who they involve—during a populist government, the more the population will rally around the flag. In both Hungary and Poland more scandals increase the government support.

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<sup>25</sup> The impact of unemployment in the short run however is not statistically significant. Similarly, populist incumbents are not punished or rewarded when GDP rates improve. Tables 3 and 4 show that for both Hungary and Poland, voters don't care as much about small improvements in GDP rates but they really care about unemployment.

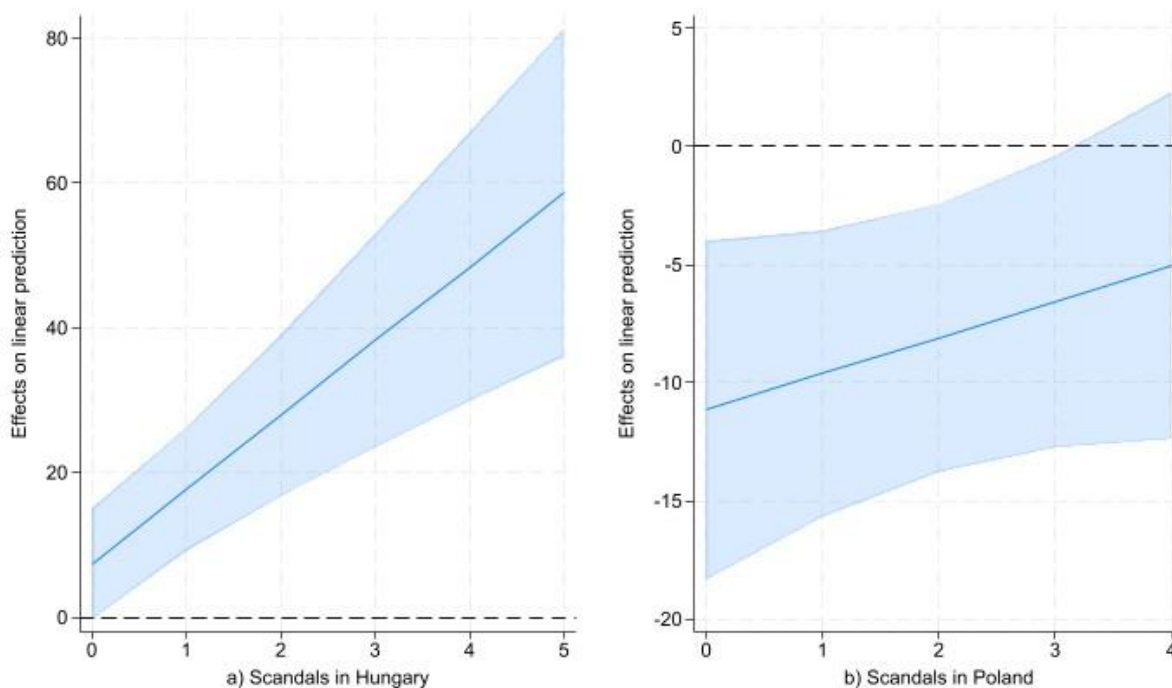


Figure 3: The impact of ethno-populist governments and scandals on government approval

### ***Populist Mobilization against the opposition***

Given the ethno-populist strategy to manage scandals involving them by spinning those and by distracting the public with scandals implicating the opposition, we examined how the latter impacts support for ethno-populist incumbents (H2). We find support for our expectation that political scandals implicating populist opponents boost populist mobilization and support. In both Hungary and Poland, opposition scandals are positively associated with support for ethno-populist incumbents. The more populists persecute the opposition with scandals, the more their approval rates suffers, through this is not a statistically significant effect. The introduction of our media pluralism and legislative controls variables boosts populist approval. A stronger economy slightly increases the impact of the rally effect in support of ethno-populist incumbents in the wake of scandals implicating their opposition. When all political and economic controls are introduced, they weaken and in the long run even reverse the boost opposition scandals give ethno-populist incumbents.

Tables 5 and 6 Here

We also examined the interaction between scandals involving the opposition and populist governments and how it impacted government approval. Opposition scandals during a populist government actually help the government approval in Hungary in the long run (Table 7) and in Poland though not as pronounced (Table 8). Panels c) and d) in Figure 4 display Models 4 in Tables 7 and 8. In both countries, more opposition scandals help the populist government in the long run.

Tables 7 and 8 Here

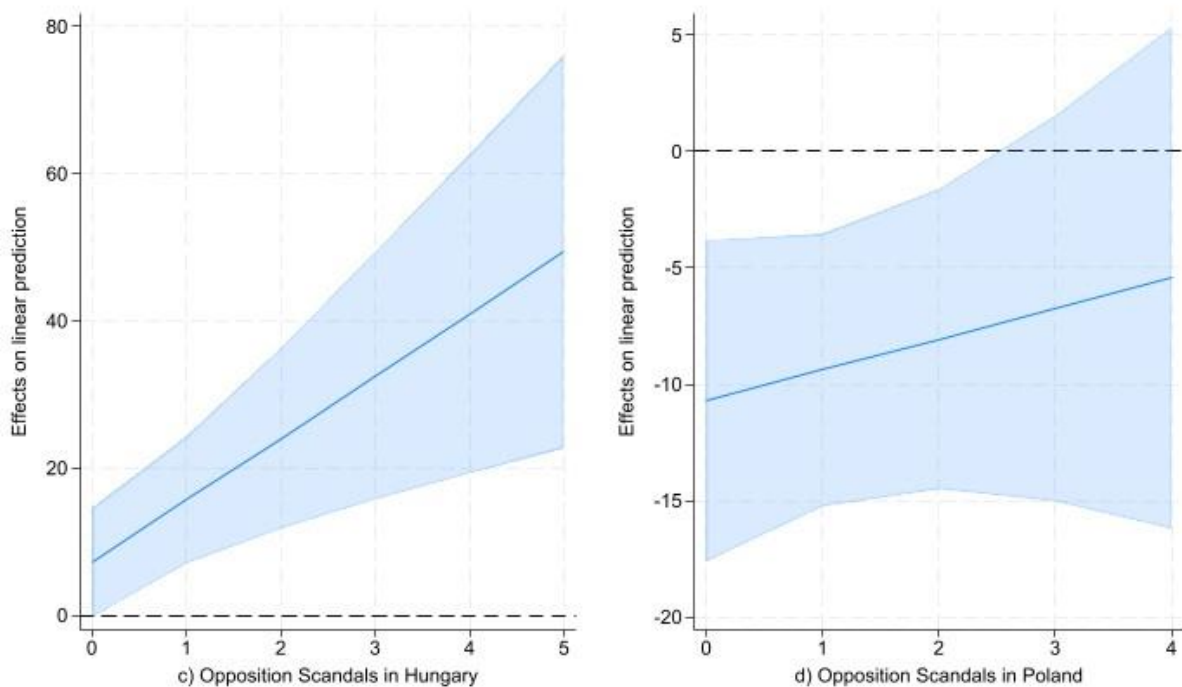


Figure 4: The impact of opposition scandals and populist governments on government approval

### **Robustness checks**

To test the robustness of our findings we run a battery of tests that examine more closely the importance of time variables in the analysis as well as various ways to conceptualize the dependent variable. We began by reanalyzing the data at monthly level, then we included a lagged DV in the models and finally employed an alternative binary version of the DV.

The data on government approval and scandals was collected at monthly level while other variables were only available at quarterly and yearly levels. When analyzing the data at the monthly level scandals continue to benefit populist governments in both Hungary and Poland but this effect diminishes in time and when we account for other variables in the political and economic environment (Appendix Tables A5 and A6). These results hold in the case of opposition scandals—they boost the populist leaders though the results are not statistically significant (Appendix Tables A7 and A8).

When adding a lagged dependent variable, we conduct a harder test to our hypotheses as the lagged DV accounts for some of the variance in the data, yet the results in Appendix Tables A9 and A10 show that populist government continue to enjoy their approval in spite of being embroiled in scandals (coefficients are positive though not statistically significant). When the opposition is involved, this results in short-term increases in approval for the populist leaders but

these scandals don't boost government approval in the long run (Appendix Tables A11 and A12).

To test the role of our operationalization of the dependent variable on the results we create an alternative binary dependent variable that is coded with a 1 if the government approval went up from the previous quarter and a 0 if the approval went down. The results of the logit regressions support our previous findings. Populist scandals boost the approval of PiS but negatively impact Fidesz approval (Appendix Tables 13 and 14). Opposition scandals boost approval for Fidesz but not for PiS (Appendix Tables 15 and 16). Again the impact is not statistically significant and it dissipates in time.

## **Conclusion**

Ethno-populists often come to power criticizing the establishment for being corrupt but after assuming office, they themselves become implicated in wrongdoing. Instead of holding them accountable, however, citizens rally around these leaders and support them even more in the face of scandals implicating them. Media pluralism and a robust opposition diminish this effect; so does an underperforming economy. Scandals implicating the ethno-populist opponents also boost their support. Anecdotal evidence suggests that ethno-populists use two strategies to immunize themselves against scandals: 1) they criticize and seek to delegitimize mainstream media as part of the corrupt establishment and 2) they also use their access to the state to smear their opponents in order to distract the citizenry from their own wrongdoing.

Our findings are broadly consistent with the theory of motivated information processing (Taber and Lodge 2006, Meffert et al. 2006), which argues that people's reaction to information is mediated by their prior beliefs, for example, how having voted for a party increases how positively citizens evaluate a candidate relative to the rival (Beasley and Joslyn 2001, Mullainathan and Washington 2009) and how tolerant they are towards wrongdoing when it is committed by their preferred party (Anduiza et al, Chang and Kerr 2015). Our findings are also in line with previous research which finds that citizens are lenient towards politicians even when they know about it their corrupt behavior when 1) the citizens do not give credibility to the information about the politician's corrupt behavior, or 2) the citizens do not consider this information important enough compared to other policy or political information (Anduiza et al), for instance when they benefit from the incumbent's policies (de Sousa and Moriconi 2013; Manzetti and Wilson 2007; Rundquist et al. 1977; Peters and Welch 1980). Given the strong affinity of the supporters of ethno-populists to the ethno-populist project, these citizens are likely forgiving of the wrongdoing of ethno-populist incumbents and likely rally to support their proffered party in the face of scandals instead.

The boost the ethno-populist incumbent gets in the wake of scandals in Hungary is weaker than in Poland. We speculate that this difference can be explained by the different economic starting points in these countries: in Hungary, where Fidesz came to power in the wake of the 2008 global financial crisis in part by promising economic unorthodoxy to avoid austerity. In contrast, the Polish economy has performed relatively well even through the thick of the 2008 global financial crisis. Given that accountability for scandals implicating ethno-populists is conditional on their performance in managing their country's economy and the importance of the economy for electing and keeping ethno-populists in power, the relatively better state of the Polish economy likely accounts for the stronger scandals rally effect in support of the ethno-populist incumbent in Poland compared to the same effect in Hungary.

We contribute to the literatures on executive scandals and on populism by studying a group of executives – ethno-populists – who are anecdotally discussed to be particularly immune to scandals. We thus examine an under-researched and possibly key driver of populist resilience in power – their ability to skirt accountability for wrongdoing. Further research should additionally explore the conditional accountability of populists. Our findings on the importance of the health of the economy and polity and the difference in accountability in Hungary and Poland suggest that the broader environment and possibly scandal characteristics likely matter as well and thus deserve closer attention in future work on (populism and) executive scandals.

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Table 3: **Impact of Fidesz scandals on executive approval in Hungary during Fidesz governments (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Fidesz scandals	1.477** (0.682)	1.825 (1.122)	0.974 (0.955)	1.216 (1.453)
Upcoming elections			0.598 (1.914)	
Media pluralism			-0.728 (1.557)	0.435 (1.381)
Legislative constr			51.87 (49.35)	46.74 (45.06)
GDP rate			-0.269 (0.415)	-0.546*** (0.185)
Unemployment			-21.41 (17.97)	-53.88** (20.12)
Observations	56	52	56	52

Table 4: **Impact of PiS scandals on executive approval in Poland during PiS governments (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
PiS scandals	2.388** (0.924)	0.480 (1.278)	1.375 (1.056)	-1.153* (0.588)
Upcoming elections			0.707 (4.311)	
Media pluralism			-5.285*** (1.425)	-3.842*** (1.057)
Legislative constr			57.02*** (14.75)	137.5*** (41.37)
GDP rate			0.0643 (0.256)	0.0240 (0.276)
Unemployment			5.089 (5.386)	-10.32*** (3.138)
Observations	34	30	33	30

Table 5: **Impact of total scandals on executive approval in Hungary (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Scandals	-5.826** (2.763)	-9.222*** (1.675)	-5.806*** (1.923)	-9.937*** (1.907)
Fidesz=1	1.220 (2.142)	2.902 (2.036)	0.328 (2.673)	7.424* (3.845)
Fidesz=1 × Scandals	6.844** (2.821)	10.22*** (1.860)	6.012*** (1.999)	10.25*** (2.202)
Upcoming elections			-0.000204 (2.464)	
Media pluralism			3.245** (1.267)	1.108 (1.367)
Legislative constr			-73.17* (40.55)	4.372 (47.73)
GDP rate			-0.106 (0.424)	-0.432 (0.262)
Unemployment			-66.89*** (16.71)	-49.79*** (18.57)
Constant	38.91*** (1.870)	37.94*** (1.510)	105.0*** (31.61)	47.30 (36.58)
Observations	88	84	88	84

Table 6: **Impact of total scandals on executive approval in Poland (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Scandals	-0.246 (0.762)	-0.552 (0.641)	-1.166* (0.674)	-1.123* (0.672)
PiS=1	-6.621*** (2.140)	-6.119** (2.524)	-10.66*** (2.808)	-11.16*** (3.607)
PiS=1 × Scandals	2.487** (1.102)	2.087* (1.150)	2.531** (1.134)	1.531 (1.136)
Upcoming elections			-0.728 (2.462)	
Media pluralism			-5.398*** (1.093)	-5.316*** (1.244)
Legislative constr			27.48 (19.19)	43.41 (32.06)
GDP rate			-0.000550 (0.250)	0.112 (0.378)
Unemployment			9.216*** (1.615)	5.683*** (1.933)
Constant	39.61*** (1.310)	39.16*** (1.330)	38.22*** (12.05)	30.79 (21.58)
Observations	89	85	88	85

Table 7: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Hungary during Fidesz governments (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	1.180 (1.563)	-0.219 (2.224)	0.418 (1.521)	-1.462 (1.741)
Upcoming elections			1.192 (1.734)	
Media pluralism			-0.553 (1.583)	0.844 (1.271)
Legislative constr			43.28 (49.54)	26.99 (39.08)
GDP rate			-0.343 (0.366)	-0.636*** (0.170)
Unemployment			-25.29 (17.32)	-62.05*** (18.11)
Observations	56	52	56	52

Table 8: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Poland during PiS governments (quarterly).** The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	1.811 (1.620)	0.850 (1.424)	0.878 (1.282)	-0.710 (1.026)
Upcoming elections			2.802 (3.332)	
Media pluralism			-5.262*** (1.464)	-4.071*** (1.123)
Legislative constr			53.63*** (16.88)	137.4*** (42.28)
GDP rate			0.00723 (0.250)	0.169 (0.280)
Unemployment			4.846 (5.396)	-9.249*** (3.182)
Observations	34	30	33	30

Table 9: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Hungary (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	-5.826** (2.763)	-9.222*** (1.675)	-5.807*** (1.929)	-9.936*** (1.919)
Fidesz=1	1.767 (2.088)	3.722* (1.930)	0.274 (2.645)	7.196* (3.731)
Fidesz=1 × Opposition scandals	7.006** (3.179)	9.003*** (2.792)	5.883** (2.542)	8.439*** (2.657)
Upcoming elections			0.0397 (2.482)	
Media pluralism			3.274*** (1.240)	1.191 (1.331)
Legislative constr			-74.92* (38.65)	-2.123 (44.84)
GDP rate			-0.125 (0.380)	-0.488* (0.248)
Unemployment			-67.80*** (14.95)	-52.91*** (17.34)
Constant	38.91*** (1.870)	37.94*** (1.510)	106.7*** (29.20)	53.69 (33.65)
Observations	88	84	88	84

Table 10: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Poland (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	-0.279 (1.220)	0.0658 (1.099)	-2.140* (1.090)	-1.049 (1.201)
PiS=1	-4.465** (1.877)	-3.994* (2.079)	-10.02*** (2.533)	-10.72*** (3.472)
PiS=1 × Opposition scandals	2.090 (2.019)	0.784 (1.787)	3.241** (1.628)	1.324 (1.600)
Upcoming elections			-0.355 (2.389)	
Media pluralism			-5.779*** (1.118)	-5.336*** (1.262)
Legislative constr			31.36 (20.04)	42.31 (32.54)
GDP rate			-0.0445 (0.255)	0.0979 (0.380)
Unemployment			9.344*** (1.669)	5.609*** (1.918)
Constant	39.58*** (1.289)	38.85*** (1.340)	37.84*** (12.50)	31.92 (22.04)
Observations	89	85	88	85

## Appendix

Table A1: **Impact of Fidesz scandals on executive approval in Hungary (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval one quarter from the scandal (Q1).

	(1)	(2)
	Q1	Q1
Fidesz scandals	1.092 (0.974)	0.729 (1.334)
Media pluralism		-1.096 (1.418)
Legislative constr		70.08 (47.32)
GDP rate		-0.224 (0.332)
Unemployment		-21.96 (16.04)
Constant	40.47*** (1.008)	5.644 (33.10)
Observations	54	54

Table A2: **Impact of PiS scandals on executive approval in Poland (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval one quarter from the scandal (Q1).

	(1)	(2)
	Q1	Q1
PiS scandals	2.471** (1.042)	1.343* (0.785)
Media pluralism		-4.231*** (1.244)
Legislative constr		80.59*** (12.30)
GDP rate		0.190 (0.213)
Unemployment		-2.386 (5.237)
Constant	34.27*** (1.684)	-2.591 (7.258)
Observations	32	32

**Table A3: Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Hungary (quarterly).** The models measure executive approval one quarter from the scandal (Q1).

	(1)	(2)
	Q1	Q1
Opposition scandals	2.276 (1.736)	1.854 (1.768)
Media pluralism		-1.052 (1.407)
Legislative constr		68.25 (45.64)
GDP rate		-0.235 (0.302)
Unemployment		-22.78 (14.66)
Constant	40.57*** (0.991)	7.087 (31.16)
Observations	54	54

Table A4: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Poland (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval one quarter from the scandal (Q1).

	(1)	(2)
	Q1	Q1
Opposition scandals	1.652 (1.625)	0.480 (0.963)
Media pluralism		-3.966*** (1.115)
Legislative constr		78.73*** (14.61)
GDP rate		0.0845 (0.252)
Unemployment		-3.581 (4.783)
Constant	35.01*** (1.348)	0.279 (8.519)
Observations	32	32

Table A5: **Impact of Fidesz scandals on executive approval in Hungary during Fidesz governments (monthly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Fidesz scandals	1.669*	1.569	0.980	0.983
	(0.903)	(1.214)	(0.864)	(1.200)
Upcoming elections			1.041	
			(1.076)	
Media pluralism			-1.821	0.995
			(2.633)	(2.240)
Legislative constr			47.02*	45.67*
			(27.55)	(23.68)
GDP rate			-0.350	-0.526***
			(0.218)	(0.109)
Unemployment			-23.96**	-53.10***
			(9.788)	(10.21)
Observations	165	153	165	153

Table A6: **Impact of PiS scandals on executive approval in Poland during PiS governments (monthly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
PiS scandals	2.512** (1.211)	1.475 (1.397)	1.317 (0.868)	-0.538 (0.693)
Upcoming elections			-0.210 (2.002)	
Media pluralism			-15.25*** (2.221)	-14.22*** (2.285)
Legislative constr			58.63*** (8.206)	172.8*** (36.91)
GDP rate			-0.0412 (0.138)	-0.0784 (0.209)
Unemployment			3.902 (2.909)	-9.992*** (2.026)
Observations	101	89	100	89

Table A7: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Hungary during Fidesz governments (monthly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	0.734 (1.948)	0.0156 (1.922)	-0.0626 (1.881)	-0.613 (1.488)
Upcoming elections			1.202 (1.003)	
Media pluralism			-1.636 (2.655)	1.254 (2.207)
Legislative constr			43.77 (27.70)	41.33* (23.14)
GDP rate			-0.377* (0.212)	-0.536*** (0.109)
Unemployment			-25.38** (9.735)	-54.66*** (10.08)
Observations	165	153	165	153

Table A8: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Poland during PiS governments (monthly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	1.757 (1.222)	1.204 (1.175)	0.900 (0.928)	0.0723 (0.702)
Upcoming elections			0.603 (1.947)	
Media pluralism			-15.20*** (2.246)	-14.24*** (2.301)
Legislative constr			57.15*** (8.603)	171.7*** (37.43)
GDP rate			-0.0653 (0.137)	-0.0594 (0.207)
Unemployment			3.831 (2.904)	-9.798*** (1.987)
Observations	101	89	100	89

Table A9: **Impact of Fidesz scandals on executive approval in Hungary adding a lagged dependent variable (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Fidesz scandals	0.203 (0.478)	0.453 (0.765)	-0.00333 (0.643)	0.255 (0.897)
Lagged DV	0.823*** (0.0667)	0.913*** (0.0663)	0.776*** (0.0715)	0.790*** (0.0942)
Upcoming elections			1.771 (1.591)	
Media pluralism			-0.532 (0.822)	0.728 (0.708)
Legislative constr			23.09 (27.05)	-8.144 (25.58)
GDP rate			-0.132 (0.223)	-0.185* (0.106)
Unemployment			-2.661 (9.955)	-21.08* (10.63)
Constant	7.488*** (2.792)	3.605 (2.628)	-3.084 (18.37)	20.37 (17.51)
Observations	55	51	55	51

Table A10: **Impact of PiS scandals on executive approval in Poland adding a lagged dependent variable (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
PiS scandals	0.0341 (0.518)	0.0609 (0.406)	0.196 (0.637)	-0.267 (0.519)
Lagged DV	0.913*** (0.0730)	0.927*** (0.0798)	0.721*** (0.0826)	0.689*** (0.216)
Upcoming elections			1.209 (1.901)	
Media pluralism			-2.536** (1.000)	-1.695* (0.881)
Legislative constr			25.95** (10.76)	64.86 (38.51)
GDP rate			0.191 (0.221)	-0.238 (0.183)
Unemployment			3.042 (4.308)	-2.795 (4.199)
Constant	2.843 (2.818)	2.210 (3.102)	-2.488 (5.340)	-25.56 (15.82)
Observations	34	30	33	30

Table A11: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Hungary adding a lagged dependent variable (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	0.957 (0.974)	0.305 (0.759)	0.945 (0.815)	-0.260 (0.896)
Lagged DV	0.827*** (0.0653)	0.922*** (0.0624)	0.780*** (0.0685)	0.791*** (0.0932)
Upcoming elections			1.996 (1.618)	
Media pluralism			-0.614 (0.800)	0.811 (0.717)
Legislative constr			26.56 (25.93)	-12.22 (24.85)
GDP rate			-0.105 (0.184)	-0.203* (0.105)
Unemployment			-0.855 (8.892)	-22.65* (11.70)
Constant	7.218** (2.826)	3.398 (2.561)	-6.316 (17.06)	23.68 (18.37)
Observations	55	51	55	51

Table A12: **Impact of opposition scandals on executive approval in Poland adding a lagged dependent variable (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	0.302 (0.822)	-0.398 (0.979)	0.0666 (0.822)	-0.560 (0.983)
Lagged DV	0.907*** (0.0890)	0.934*** (0.0899)	0.725*** (0.0919)	0.706*** (0.187)
Upcoming elections			1.487 (1.786)	
Media pluralism			-2.523** (0.991)	-1.734** (0.831)
Legislative constr			25.62** (11.98)	64.54* (34.08)
GDP rate			0.185 (0.220)	-0.194 (0.188)
Unemployment			2.980 (4.389)	-2.441 (3.435)
Constant	2.908 (3.130)	2.228 (3.176)	-2.283 (6.470)	-26.28 (15.44)
Observations	34	30	33	30

Table A13: **Impact of Fidesz scandals on binary executive approval in Hungary (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Fidesz scandals	-0.0250 (0.303)	0.0959 (0.384)	-0.293 (0.383)	-0.432 (0.566)
Upcoming elections			0.968 (1.134)	
Media pluralism			-0.296 (0.512)	0.637 (0.526)
Legislative constr			1.731 (16.65)	-18.35 (17.52)
GDP rate			0.0625 (0.0962)	-0.415** (0.183)
Unemployment			2.020 (6.258)	-13.23* (6.896)
Constant	0.0500 (0.320)	0.148 (0.342)	-0.913 (11.71)	17.05 (12.50)
Observations	55	51	55	51

Table A14: **Impact of PiS scandals on binary executive approval in Poland (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
PiS scandals	0.173 (0.403)	0.569 (0.386)	0.483 (0.618)	0.785 (0.510)
Upcoming elections			-1.740 (1.401)	
Media pluralism			-0.325 (0.566)	-1.399* (0.799)
Legislative constr			5.405 (8.196)	50.45* (28.50)
GDP rate			0.0968 (0.122)	-0.471 (0.292)
Unemployment			-0.221 (1.894)	0.667 (1.524)
Constant	-0.225 (0.429)	-0.652 (0.498)	-2.750 (4.974)	-31.83* (17.99)
Observations	34	30	33	30

Table A15: **Impact of opposition scandals on binary executive approval in Hungary (quarterly).** The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	0.270 (0.576)	0.127 (0.614)	0.203 (0.612)	-0.167 (0.661)
Upcoming elections			0.882 (1.113)	
Media pluralism			-0.381 (0.498)	0.531 (0.494)
Legislative constr			5.752 (15.86)	-13.74 (16.25)
GDP rate			0.0936 (0.0967)	-0.376** (0.160)
Unemployment			3.815 (5.908)	-11.11* (6.053)
Constant	-0.0219 (0.298)	0.167 (0.315)	-4.347 (10.97)	13.13 (11.21)
Observations	55	51	55	51

Table A16: **Impact of opposition scandals on binary executive approval in Poland (quarterly)**. The models measure executive approval at the time of the scandal (Q0), and one year out (Q4).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Q0	Q4	Q0	Q4
Opposition scandals	3.26e-17 (0.445)	-0.0776 (0.439)	-0.271 (0.486)	-0.100 (0.469)
Upcoming elections			-1.071 (1.314)	
Media pluralism			-0.372 (0.516)	-1.253 (0.787)
Legislative constr			7.575 (8.706)	48.35* (26.54)
GDP rate			0.0963 (0.118)	-0.440** (0.216)
Unemployment			-0.498 (1.784)	-0.0808 (1.469)
Constant	-0.118 (0.414)	-0.225 (0.452)	-3.407 (5.044)	-29.42* (16.38)
Observations	34	30	33	30