

# SCANDALS IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: AN OUTRAGEOUS HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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**Steffen Burkhardt**

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ORIGINAL SCIENTIFIC PAPER / DOI:10.20901/ms.14.28.2 / SUBMITTED: 30.06.2023.

**ABSTRACT** *The specific characteristics of political scandals in a global context follow the historical evolution of international communication technologies and media systems. This article examines the development of political scandals through selected cases in a global context. The global scandal evolution took place in three phases: (1) the written duplication of morals created the conditions for international reports on political scandals; (2) the establishment of an international media system transformed political scandals into an integral part of global public spheres; (3) the digitization of scandals on the Internet put moral pressure on global politics – resulting in permanent and omnipresent international scandal discourses. The digitization of political scandals comes, on the one hand, along with the loss of journalistic gatekeepers, post-truth manipulation of public spheres, influence from abroad and the risk of social unrest. On the other hand, it provides the chance to better understand the chances and limits of globalization.*

## **KEY WORDS**

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MEDIA HISTORY, SCANDAL HISTORY, HISTORICAL SCANDALS, DIGITIZATION, GLOBALIZATION

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*Author's note* \_\_\_\_\_

**Steffen Burkhardt** :: HAW Hamburg, Department of Information and Media Communication ::  
steffen.burkhardt@haw-hamburg.de

## INTRODUCTION

Scandals are particularly suitable for surveying the cross-border interrelations of political discourses. As communication processes in which the social code is negotiated by rival collectives, they form moral maps in the global context. Depending on their significance and outcome they help to better understand the norms and values of an era. The global context can be thought of from two perspectives. Firstly, as communication processes, scandals can transport local, regional, or national offenses in international public spheres. Secondly, scandals can relate to alleged moral offenses in supranational contexts (e.g., when they concern supranational organizations such as the European Union). Both perspectives will be analyzed in this article using selected historical milestones of the political scandal in a global context. Above all, these milestones are exemplary for a change in times. Of course, the list of scandals is selective and does not include all major political scandals. The aim of the selection is rather to achieve transparency about the communication conditions that enabled political scandals to emerge in a global context and shaped their characteristics.

Scandals are not defined as offenses, but as specific communication processes about supposed offenses (Adut, 2008; Bulkow & Petersen, 2011; Burkhardt, 2006; Haller & Michael, 2018; Kepplinger, 2009; Thompson, 1997, 2000). For the communication analysis it is initially irrelevant whether scandal allegations are true or not, since it is not the alleged abuses that are examined, but the communication content and processes (Burkhardt, 2006). Whether an alleged offense turns into a political scandal does not depend on its political relevance but on the meaning that is attached to it in the public negotiation process.

Therefore, the organizational conditions of the public spheres are constitutive of political scandals in global contexts. They were shaped by several communication (r)evolutions through the centuries (Behringer, 2006; Habermas, 1990; Innis, 2007; McLuhan, 1992). This paper elaborates how the transformation of the public sphere in the historical process of globalization has changed political scandals from the oral communication practices of small communities to the global village in an electronically networked world.

Not every scandal directly affects the political system per se but is political. Even scandals about supposedly apolitical misconduct such as sports betting fraud (cf. Hill, 2013) or food contamination (cf. Linzmaier, 2007) or personal issues such as an abortion (cf. Ziegler, 2020) or wearing a burka (Cohen-Almagor, 2022) have been, and continue to be, controversies. They raise questions of *political regulation*, not only at different times, but also in different societies. The same applies to entertainment scandals such as controversies concerning a pop star's nipple exposition on live TV or sexual abuse by rock bands, in which demands for *political intervention* are made. At its core, every scandal has the potential to affect the political system, and this is also used strategically by scandalizers: they politicize by establishing references to politics between the scandalized events, conditions, or actions. This helps to legitimize the distribution of the

alleged offenses. While all scandals are essentially political scandals, this review focuses on scandals involving alleged misconduct of the political system in general, and of the legislative, executive, and judiciary in particular.

In a global context, the living environments in different countries are strongly networked. Therefore, a Quran burning in Sweden triggers a political scandal in Islamic countries almost in real time. The international, mass media communication between individuals is a development linked to the rise of social networks and microblogs. But how have these media changed the political scandal in the global context since its inception?

### FROM LOCAL TALK TO DISTRIBUTED PRINT SCANDALS

Without media participation, political scandals serve to negotiate social norms within local publics, such as village inhabitants. The power imbalance between the scandalized and the scandalizers is based on their position in the village. A leader has more influence on the scandal discourse than a simple villager; a well-connected person has more influence than a poorly connected one. This also applies to the reception of the scandal outside the village in which it happened: a villager who is linked to the neighboring village and the first person there to describe the scandal has a decisive influence on the perception of the events. More people will listen to a person who tells an exciting story about a political scandal than to a boring narrator.

The Ancient Greek comedy-writer Aristophanes (Athens around 446 BCE to 386 BCE) knew already about the importance of the narrative as a core element of scandalization. He describes a dynamic and rhetorically brilliant prosecutor in court who, with his words, 'sets' the accused into a trap (Lindblom, 1921, p. 6) and compares the words of the prosecutor with a *scandalēthronē* (as cited in Käsler, 1991).

With the invention of writing, the simple principle of storytelling in networks changed. Narrators no longer have to travel to other places to scandalize themselves. They can write down the scandal, then they need messengers who can carry their messages to other places and recipients who can read and understand them. In addition to this local dimension, the scandal can last beyond the scandalizers' own age, if the written statement of scandalization lasts longer than their life. The influence of scandals increases with their geographic and temporal reach. In contrast to the retelling of a scandal, in which the content changes constantly due to different narrators, the narrative of the scandal always remains the same when it is written down, even if it is repeated in different places and in different decades, hence the power shift in scandals in favor of the people who have access to the media. This applies not only to storytellers, but also to scandalized people and scandalizers. In 1517, for example, the German professor of Bible interpretation Martin Luther, whose 95 theses against the sale of indulgences in the Roman Catholic Church were initially unanswered by the archbishop, decided to give them as prints to several confidants. Only the spread of the prints triggered the great scandal that led to the schism in the church (Clemen, 1904). The great interest in a revision of faith politics led to

a flood of pamphlets in which Luther and other reformers spread their ideas (Lies, 2021). Pamphlets reached hitherto unknown circulation levels and numbers. In 1524, there were already 2,400 pamphlets in approximately 2.4 million copies published (Köhler, 1986).

The written dissemination of scandal texts led to the development of another characteristic that shapes political scandals in a global context (Neutsch, 1995): it became easier for scandalizers to distribute their accusations anonymously. This resulted in a wave of political scandals with anonymous scandalizers.

The culture of political scandals reached its first peak in pre-revolutionary France. The life at the royal court *chroniques scandaleuses* was scandalized and paved the way for the 1789 French revolution. One of the most notable scandals in these years was the *affair of the diamond necklace* from 1785 and 1786. Napoleon I was certainly not entirely wrong when he, years later, somewhat exaggeratedly claimed that this “affair Queen Marie-Antoinette had cost her life in 1793” (Maza, 1993, p. 163). The fraud scandal represented one of the most important political events of the late Ancien Régime in France, which received continuous coverage in Europe. Its international attention resulted from the high nobility of the protagonists. In particular, international gazettes such as the *Gazette de Leyde* and the *Gazette des Deux-Ponts* spread the scandal outside France: to Holland, Germany and Switzerland, thus making it a central media event abroad (Angelike et al., 1997). The German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1792) wrote about the scandal in his comedy *Der Groß-Cophta* – an example of the early adaptation of a political scandal in entertainment culture abroad.

## THE MASS MEDIA SYSTEM: THE BIRTHPLACE OF INTERNATIONAL SCANDALS

With the evolution of the mass media, namely the press in the second half of the 19th century and the increasing literacy of the population, political scandals could be circulated internationally for the first time in a larger number of copies, especially since the 1870s when rotary printing press was in commercial use in many Western countries. The press enabled the evolution of a commercial media system that required best-selling stories such as political affairs.

In addition, scandalous items of information about alleged abuses of power from all over the world were increasingly being reported in new international communication networks. This was made possible by the founding of the *Universal Postal Union*, established by the Treaty of Bern of 1874. It guaranteed international cooperation between postal companies and authorities – the framework for cross-border postal traffic (cf. Neutsch, 1995). At the same time, the telecommunications system developed with telex machines for telegrams and telephones for calls. The new communication technologies facilitated the success of a worldwide network of political correspondents for news agencies such as the French *Havas* (founded in 1835), British *Reuters* (founded in 1851) and German *Wolff* (founded in 1849) that signed an agreement known as the *Ring Combination*.

In the internationally networked communication landscape, political scandals such as the *Kruger telegram affair*, the *Dreyfus affair*, the *Harden-Eulenburg affair*, and the *Daily Telegraph affair* became topics all over Europe and overseas – with hardly any regulation and ethical guidelines for political journalists. The political scandal surrounding the French artillery captain Alfred Dreyfus started with his wrongful conviction by a military court in 1894 for alleged treason in favor of the German Empire. It led to years of public disputes and further court proceedings (Basch, 1994; Baumont, 1959; Burns, 1984). The military leadership wanted to prevent the rehabilitation of the Jew Dreyfus and the conviction of the actual traitor. Anti-Semitic, clerical and monarchist newspapers and politicians incited certain sections of the population. Even many families and longtime friends were deeply divided and stopped speaking to each other because of their differing opinions on the matter. In Paris, Dreyfus's public supporters were threatened, convicted, or dismissed from the army. Even Jews in French Algeria were under attack. The French newspaper *Le Figaro* ended its collaboration with the writer Émile Zola after right-wing nationalists called for a subscription boycott because of his contributions. Finally, in 1898, he was able to publish his famous article *J'accuse...!* in the newly founded literary journal *L'Aurore* that became prominent all over Europe. In it, he denounced the masterminds of the plot against Dreyfus on the front page of an open, full-page letter to the President of the Republic. Within hours, more than 200,000 copies of the newspaper had been sold and Zola had to flee France to avoid imprisonment (Brennan, 1998; Datta & Silverman, 1998; Fuchs, 1994). The Dreyfus affair and the associated growing anti-Semitism are considered to be the decisive reasons why the Austro-Hungarian writer Theodor Herzl, the then Paris correspondent of the Viennese daily newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*, developed Zionism (Duclert, 1948).

The mass media system became the birthplace of international scandals. Thanks to the lucrative market for news, a jittery attention economy of the rival Old and New Worlds emerged, where political slurs from abroad spread quickly and scandals boosted newspaper sales in the Western nation-states (Esser & Umbricht, 2016). How naturally foreign media reported on international developments at the turn of the century can be observed in a German-British state affair in the context of colonial politics: the scandal surrounding the *Kruger telegram*. In 1896, the last German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, sent a telegram congratulating Paulus Kruger, the President of the South African Republic on what is now the Transvaal, on his victory over the *Jameson Raid*. In this sortie about 600 British irregulars from Cape Colony attacked the Transvaal in British interests, to trigger an anti-government uprising by the primarily British expatriate miners. In the telegram, the German Emperor implied an independence that the Transvaal State did not legally possess due to its restrictions on foreign affairs, which represented an attack on British rights. The text was made available to the media almost simultaneously, including the *Reuters* and *Wolff's Telegraphic Bureau* (cf. Seligmann, 1998). The case shows how naturally news agencies were already involved in international political scandals. While the mostly conservative German press agreed with the Kaiser, British newspapers criticized him with spiteful attacks. The *First Royal Dragoons*, of which he was honorary colonel, at times hung his portrait facing the wall in the casino while Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm II's grandmother, shared her "sorrow & astonishment" about his telegram (cf. Röhl, 2017).

The *Harden-Eulenburg affair* surrounding Wilhelm II was also closely intertwined with the international mass media landscape. It became and was one of the most spectacular political scandals of the German Empire that caused sensation worldwide. This controversy comprises a series of court-martials and court cases from 1907 to 1909 alleging homosexual behavior and the defamation lawsuits brought against these allegations – involving well-known political advisors and friends of the Kaiser, such as Philipp, Prince of Eulenburg. Maximilian Harden, editor of the weekly newspaper *Die Zukunft*, deliberately orchestrated the affair in order to put foreign policy pressure on the Kaiser (Hecht, 1997). The journalist exploited the alleged scandal to portray the Kaiser's closest friends as a homoerotic round table that had been trying to divert Wilhelm II for two decades from Bismarck's 'male' course and instead wanted to persuade him to pursue a lasting peace policy towards Great Britain and France (Domeier, 2010, pp. 301-345). Harden expected that this might risk a renunciation of German colonies or the annexed Imperial Territory of Alsace-Lorraine. Meanwhile, *The Daily Telegraph* published a conversation with the Emperor on October 28, 1908, which caused a great outrage in Germany because of undiplomatic and false statements (Röhl, 2014). The British newspaper presented what appeared to be an interview with Wilhelm II. It was in fact the reworked notes by British Army officer Edward Montagu-Stuart-Wortley of conversations he had with the Kaiser in 1907. The interview had previously been submitted to Chancellor Bernhard von Bülow for authorization, but he passed it on to the Foreign Ministry's press office for their review, which apparently was not done. In the Reichstag and in public, all political parties were mad at the Kaiser. Even the conservatives, whose opinion had already become critical because of the *Harden-Eulenburg affair*, condemned the Kaiser. The Chancellor distanced himself from the Emperor to distract attention from his own failure to review the interview and was dismissed. Foreign reporting thus had a retroactive effect on domestic events. The foreign interview became a trap for national politics. Both the *Harden-Eulenburg affair* and the simultaneous *Daily Telegraph affair* led to government crises, which were widely reported around the world. The cases such as the *Dreyfus affair* in France illustrate how the emergence of an internationally networked media system created a new type of political scandal, which the media not only reported on, but which arose in the first place under pressure from international media (cf. Thompson, 2000).

## THE ELECTRIFICATION OF THE POLITICAL SCANDAL

While the 19th century's rotary presses were the midwives of international scandals, the 20th century's electronic media became their global playground. Newspapers and magazines provided the public with scandals from all over the world and became supplemented by audio-visual storytelling in a powerful news media system.

With the introduction of the first *regulated radio programs* around 1920 and the founding of *news cinemas* a few years later, in which newsreels were shown, scandals found their way into people's everyday lives electronically. The military recognized early the possibility of using film for psychological warfare and promoted the film industry in

many countries. This led to state regulation or control of broadcasting and film production. Political scandals were often directed against foreign and domestic government opponents in the wake of the world wars in the first half of the 20th century. The speed at which scandals spread increased with the availability of electronic transmission. This led to a further strengthening of journalists' sovereignty as gatekeepers and narrators of political scandals in a global context.

With the establishment of television stations with full programs and domestic TV sets in the second half of the 20th century, they could be broadcast live with moving images in the living room at home and the *news cinemas* became less important. The increasing variety of programs caused the decline of influence of regulatory authorities. In the new electronic media environment censorship became virtually impossible. Scandalous events once broadcast became difficult to get rid of afterwards. This has been particularly true since the introduction of video cassette recorders such as Sony's *CV-2000 model*, which paved the way for the home market as a video tape recorder from 1965.

Each of the major political scandals of this decade, such as *Profumo* (1962-1963), *Watergate* (1972-1974), *Koreagate* (1972-1974) and *Iran-Contra* (1985-1986) caused a stir internationally. They were revealed by newspaper journalists, but found rapid, international dissemination through broadcasters.

How intensively reporters researched global political scandals on behalf of media companies in the 20th century and how strongly the revelations in the media business influenced political relations became obvious in the scandal surrounding the Greenpeace ship *Rainbow Warrior*. The ship was on its way to protest against a planned French nuclear test in Moruroa and became a target of an intelligence operation by the *Direction générale de la Sécurité extérieure (DGSE)*. The French foreign intelligence agency wanted to prevent protests by Greenpeace and sunk the ship on July 10, 1985 at the port of Auckland, New Zealand. The Portuguese-Dutch photographer Fernando Pereira died on board in the state-terrorist assassination that was planned and financed with the approval of President François Mitterrand (Wilson, 2010). After the bombing, New Zealand police identified two French agents, Captain Dominique Prieur and Commander Alain Mafart, as accomplices. France, an ally of New Zealand, initially denied any involvement and jointly condemned the *act of terrorism*. When it became clear that the bombing was the act of the government of a friendly state, New Zealand no longer described the attack as an act of terrorism, but as a *criminal attack* violating international law on sovereign territory. The aspect of violation of international law was raised in all communications to the United Nations to prevent the French government from any arguments that might imply justifying its actions. The arrested agents pled guilty to manslaughter and were sentenced to ten years in prison on November 22, 1985. However, France set up its own commission of inquiry, which found the French government innocent and claimed that the arrested agents were merely spying on Greenpeace. When *The Times* and *Le Monde* refuted this account and revealed that President Mitterrand had authorized the bombing, Secretary of Defense Charles Hernu resigned and the head of the DGSE was sacked. Finally, due to the journalistic

revelations, Prime Minister Laurent Fabius admitted in a press conference that the bomb attack was a French secret service action. However, the top government remained in office and protected the DGSE and put New Zealand under economic pressure until they had freed the agents Mafart and Prieur in 1987. Back in France, they were awarded military decorations and promoted (Robie, 2007). The *Rainbow Warrior Scandal* illustrated how different the consequences of political scandals are in a global context. What is seen as scandalous in one country may not cause outrage in another, depending on different cultural perspectives and opposed national interests.

The expansion of international correspondent networks and electronic transmission via satellite in the second half of the 20th century led to an intensification of foreign reporting, in which political scandals from other countries were reported daily. Despite the constant stream of news, only a few of them remained permanently present in cultural memory.

A groundbreaking change for political scandals in a global context happened in 1998. For the first time, power shifted from newspaper publishers and broadcasting companies to the Internet with the *Clinton-Lewinsky affair* of US President Bill Clinton. For the first time in the mass media history of political scandals, the classic gatekeepers in the major news companies lost their sovereignty over scandals. The US magazine *Newsweek* had been researching the affair for almost a year, but there were still doubts about the credibility of the sources, so the editors decided to withhold the story about Clinton's sexual relationship with intern Monica Lewinsky from November 1995 to March 1997. That all changed on January 17, 1998, when the *Drudge Report* website broke the news that *Newsweek* had information about an inappropriate relationship between "a White House intern" and the President, but withheld publication (S. E. Bennett, 2002). After Drudge's report was published, *Newsweek* released the story and the scandal ensued. Because of the sex affair and an alleged false statement, Clinton had to testify before the team of special counsel Kenneth Starr in August 1998. Although the hearing was held behind closed doors, a video recording was released to the public on September 21, 1998, broadcast on television worldwide and circulated on the Internet. The scandal culminated in the impeachment of Bill Clinton. The *Drudge Report*, founded by Matt Drudge in 1995, was no longer able to surpass its global Lewinsky scoop, but paved the way for a new scandal sector that no longer followed the ethical standards of professional journalism and changed politics with fabricated outrage. It has been copied many times, amongst others by Andrew Breitbart, who was Drudge's first assistant. From 2007 onwards, Breitbart has been running his website *Breitbart News* and helped Donald Trump into the White House in 2016 using scandalization techniques (Peeters et al., 2023). The Lewinsky affair thus anticipated a development that would shape political scandals in the electronically networked international public spheres of the 21st century: anyone with Internet access can plant a political scandal in the global village – and it will be difficult for those who are the subject of a scandal to erase the allegations from collective memory.



## OUTRAGE IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

The digitization of scandals on the Internet put moral pressure on political communication in the 21st century in many ways. Above all, the changes can be characterized by two developments: firstly, the digital space became a source of political scandal topics in which all content can be accessed almost indefinitely in terms of time and location, and secondly, scandalizers became able to trigger viral outrage worldwide. Consequently, a rise in political scandals was observed (cf. Allern et al., 2012; Burkhardt, 2018; Downey & Stanyer, 2013; Haller & Michael, 2018, 2020; Imhof, 2002; Kepplinger, 2018; Kumlin & Esaasson, 2012; Strömbäck, 2008).

Especially ideological conflicts became a major topic of outrage in the global village. The inhuman images of the global torture scandal in *Abu Ghraib prison* during the occupation of Iraq by the United States quickly spread worldwide via the Internet after their publication via the US television channel CBS in April 2004 (Binder, 2013). In the photos, American torturers posed triumphantly alongside the mostly proven innocent prisoners they had abused, raped, and often tortured to death. While foreign politicians and the media sharply criticized the American government for human rights violations, the discourse in the United States was divided (Burkhardt, 2006). Several newspapers, such as *The New York Times* and *The Boston Globe*, requested Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to resign. There were also numerous public advocates of the torture (WL Bennett et al., 2006, 2008; Porpora et al., 2010). The still popular radio host Michael Savage said, "Instead of putting joysticks, I would have liked to have seen dynamite put in their orifices", and that "we need more of the humiliation tactics, not less." (cf. Rowling et al., 2011). These different assessments already revealed a divided public, which increased in the following decade. In Internet forums, extreme positions were expressed, especially in terms of the attention economy and algorithms. These distortions of discourse contained enormous conflict potential for international understanding and international politics.

The humiliation of the Islamic prisoners of war was followed by a scandal in the global discourse that caused further escalation: the controversy over the *Muhammad Cartoons* in the Danish daily newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in 2005 and 2006 with more than 200 deaths globally (Eide & Kunelius, 2008). The publication of the cartoons followed a report by a Danish children's book author who claimed that three illustrators refused to work for his new book on the life of the Prophet Muhammad out of fear of reprisals. *Jyllands-Posten* wanted to explore how much Danish illustrators felt threatened. It commissioned 12 caricatures and published them on September 30, 2005 (Eide & Kunelius, 2008). In October, the Egyptian newspaper *Al Fagr* reprinted some of the cartoons, including one of the Prophet with a bomb in his turban, without much protest (Magala, 2008). The political scandal arose only in the global context after the publication of a dossier prepared by the Danish Imam Ahmad Abu Laban and the Islamic activist Ahmed Akkari for a trip to Egypt and Lebanon.

The *Akkari-Laban dossier*, which was presented to representatives of the Arab League and Muslim clerics and academics, also contained three Islamophobic images that were

said to be *Jyllands-Posten* Muhammad cartoons but were in fact neither commissioned nor published by the newspaper. From January 2006, the international distribution of the dossier led to reactions such as the boycott of Danish and Norwegian goods in many Arab countries, the closing of Libya's embassy in Copenhagen and the ambassador to Saudi Arabia's departure. In addition, the interior ministers of 17 Arab countries passed a resolution, according to which the Danish government must "severely punish" the authors of the cartoons. In response, the EU threatened to appeal to the WTO if Arab governments supported the boycott of Danish and Norwegian goods. On the Internet, the cartoons were sent by e-mail and scandalized in Islamic blogs and forums as well as the video portal YouTube (founded in 2005), and called for *jihad* (Al-Rawi, 2015). In addition, the Arabic television channel Al Jazeera broadcast a speech by Mouhammed Fouad al-Barazi, well-known in the Muslim world as Denmark-based leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, who tearfully claimed that in Denmark text messages were calling on people to burn the Quran. In fact, there was a corresponding announcement by the right-wing splinter party Danish Front, which pretended to want to carry out such a Quran burning at one of their demonstrations. Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei claimed on Iranian television that the cartoonists were paid by Jews and part of a campaign by "filthy Zionists" who have "full control" not only of the newspapers and media, but also of the US government. There were almost everywhere in Islamic countries violent attacks on diplomatic institutions and citizens of Denmark and other European countries, as well as on Christian churches. An international discussion arose about freedom of religion, freedom of the press, freedom of art and freedom of expression. Most European media reprinted the cartoons to clarify their point of view. This also included the editorial staff of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*, which suffered Islamist-motivated terrorist attacks and killings in 2011, 2015 and 2020 after the publication of cartoons of Muhammad.

Since the *Jyllands-Posten controversy*, both far-right and Islamist extremists have used the Muhammad cartoons to draw a radical line between Muslims and non-Muslims (de Groot Heupner, 2022). The scandal not only revealed the enormous potential for controversies in global public spheres when the guiding code of morality is ideologically attacked. It also showed that scandals of the 21st century are no longer negotiated exclusively within societies that have a similar understanding of conflict management. Political scandals in a global context do not fundamentally differ in terms of conflict negotiation from scandals in local villages: violent conflicts are also common practice there in the heat of the battle. However, outrage in the global village has shifted away from the journalistic-dominated communication of the 20th century. Social networks have increasingly established themselves as important discourse platforms for political scandalization in global contexts. A comparison of local scandals and mediated scandals in social media therefore reveals significant differences in terms of the degree of publication, the modes of transgression, the temporal-spatial framing of the history of the scandal, the difference and identity management updated by it and the presence of those staged by the scandalization images (Burkhardt 2018).

These differences between outrage in the global village and local scandals can be observed in all major political scandals of the first two decades of the 21st century. In

2011, for the first time, a politician had to resign over the new Internet phenomenon of sexting. Anthony Weiner, Member of the United States House of Representatives from New York City, rose to global fame with photos of his genitals in underwear, taken with his smartphone and posted on the microblogging platform Twitter that was established in 2006. Weiner's communication failure was scandalized on social networks and journalists worldwide reported on it (Erzikova & Simpson, 2018). The discourse thus combined both non-professionally produced statements of everyday communication in different publics as well as professionally produced statements of journalism in the media system.

With the US presidential election of Donald J. Trump in 2016, the permanent scandalization of political opponents and self-scandalization became the hallmark of self-portrayal as a political underdog and lawyer of the underclass (McIntosh & Mendoza-Denton, 2020). Trump's presidency was accompanied by constant outrage, propagandistic lies, and unparalleled moral transgressions – including political influence by Russia (Darr et al., 2019). With the virulence of his scandals, Trump achieved maximized media exposure from his very first campaign, accompanied by aggressive Twitter posts in which he revealed his worldview to his supporters directly and without journalistic framing (Searles & Banda, 2019). At the same time, he put pressure on political journalists worldwide to follow him on Twitter and report on his agenda setting. The discourse power changed in favor of the president as scandalizer in digital public spheres – and journalism continued to lose influence in political scandals.

However, the possibility of global scandalization on the Internet was not reserved for presidents only. The blasting force of scandalization in social media suddenly became visible in the wake of the *Weinstein Scandal*. In this scandal, the anger at chauvinism, which was presented by Trump as socially acceptable again, exploded first in the United States. In October 2017, *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker* accused the powerful US film producer Harvey Weinstein of decades of sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape against dozens of women in the film industry. After the film mogul denied all allegations, actress Alyssa Milano called on women via Twitter on October 15, 2017 to use the phrase *Me too* to draw attention to the extent of sexual harassment and assault. More than ten thousand people replied directly to Milano's original tweet, including politicians from different countries. Under the hashtag *#MeToo*, the allegations became a persistent topic for several weeks and months in at least 85 countries (Lee & Murdie, 2021). Alternative language variants of the hashtag have been used across the globe in non-English speaking countries, including France, Italy, Iran, Israel, Japan, Spain, Vietnam, and the People's Republic of China. The wave of worldwide *#MeToo* allegations against numerous celebrities and politicians received special attention due to the global framing. The communication event was thus the first political scandal that was simultaneously adapted and updated by a global public in national languages in such a way that national sub-scandals of a global scandal emerged.

The *Weinstein Scandal* became a global scandal wave with far-reaching consequences for politicians in many countries, who were sometimes little known internationally. In the UK, Defense Secretary Michael Fallon resigned after Fallon's cabinet colleague Andrea

Leadsom complained to Prime Minister Teresa May that he had made lewd remarks (Julios, 2022). Welsh Minister Carl Sargeant committed suicide days after being suspended for alleged sexual abuse (ibid.). The European Parliament convened a session in the wake of the *MeToo* movement after allegations emerged against several members of Parliament and at the European Union offices in Brussels (Berthet & Kantola, 2021). In the United States, eight women made public allegations against former President George H. W. Bush of sexually harassing them at meetings. Several politicians reported on their experiences of sexual abuse. Congressman John Conyers had to resign in the wake of #MeToo after it became public that he had sexually harassed several female workers and used taxpayer money to settle harassment claims. Senate member Al Franken resigned from office after several women reported sexual harassment, including groping. On February 10, 2022, the US Congress passed legislation designed to ensure that anyone who is sexually harassed in the workplace has a legal remedy. In the same year, the statute of limitations on sex offenses was lifted. This allowed American journalist E. Jean Carroll to file a civil suit against Donald J. Trump alleging that he had raped her at the Bergdorf Goodman department store in New York in the 1990s. In 2023, the former president was sentenced to \$5 million in damages in this sexual abuse and defamation trial.

The outrage in the global village showed how social media can activate political scandals on a global scale. While in the face-to-face publics scandalizers and the scandalized had (depending on their social positions) relatively balanced power, political scandals in the global context developed a high degree of virulence that came along with an imbalance of power: the scattering effect means a loss of power of the scandalized and strengthening of the scandalizers' impact if there is no Internet censorship.

Autocratic states however censor the digital communication in political scandals. The result is not only that the scandal-related information on social media platforms differs between them and democracies, but even in digital one-to-one communication. A research team led by Crete-Nishihata (et al. 2017) used the case of *Liu Xiaobo Scandal* to explore these differences. China's only Nobel Peace Prize winner and most famous political prisoner was arrested in December 2008 for taking part in *Charta 08*, a manifesto calling for political reform and an end to one-party rule. *Charta 08* became a national Chinese scandal, whereas Xiaobo's arrest caused outrage mainly in many democratic countries (Alvaro, 2013). Scandals on political writers and activists in a global context show often this pattern: some countries rate their writings as scandalous, while other countries see the scandal in the scandalization, censorship and persecution of writers, journalists and whistleblowers who expose abuses, such as Judith Miller in 2004 in the *Plame affair* (Pearlstine, 2007), Chelsea Manning since 2010 and Julian Assange since 2012 in *WikiLeaks* (Brevini, 2013) or Edward Snowden in the *NSA global surveillance and espionage affair* since 2013 (Touchton et al., 2020). In the eyes of some they are criminals, in the eyes of others they are fighters for justice. Thus, this is not an exclusively Chinese problem. Liu Xiaobo died of complications from liver cancer on July 13, 2017, eight years after his incarceration. The scope of censorship of keywords and images on WeChat related to him was greatly expanded after his death. The analysis of WeChat's keyword-based censorship showed that after his death, messages containing his name in English

and in both Simplified and Traditional Chinese were blocked (Crete-Nishihata et al., 2017). For the first time, image filtering in one-to-one chats could also be demonstrated in addition to image filtering in group chats and WeChat moments. Sina Weibo also banned searching for Liu Xiaobo's name in English and both simplified and traditional Chinese. Since his death, his first name Xiaobo alone has been enough to trigger automated censorship. In other words, written individual communication about supposedly scandalous content was automatically erased. In China, the political scandal could only be discussed in uncensored publics, while internationally it could be discussed, reported, and researched without censorship.

In the digital public spheres, which became popular with the promise of more transparency, two opposing developments can therefore be observed: on the one hand, there are more topics for political scandals, with which scandalizers and their moral collectives have gained influence and a (largely) global thematic public for moral transgressions. On the other hand, political scandals are sometimes deliberately suppressed by being censored or drowned out by other topics. Thus, political scandals, even in the global village, once again follow the inherent rules of national public spheres.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In the global context, the genesis of the political scandal is closely linked to the possibilities of communication and the associated media publicity. Orally negotiated scandals in local communities became mediated scandals that take place under the conditions of the respective media system. While journalists acted as scandal gatekeepers in the 20th century and dominated storytelling, in the 21st century social media increasingly gained influence on political scandals worldwide.

Non-transparent algorithms spread polarizing scandals in the social media sphere faster and exacerbated their political escalation. The merging of truth and fiction had replaced journalistic research as the basis for social self-observation and self-description in parts of the population that obtained information exclusively from *alternative news* or social media posts. This development offers a foretaste of post-truth scandals, in which deep fakes and AI applications are used to stimulate political events and movements in global contexts. Networked societies encounter different practices of the sayable and the unsayable and form moral collectives in such different cultures as high-tech autocracies with censored media systems, democracies with diverse world views and nomadic tribal societies that receive the same communication content via mobile data transmission. Hence, scandals are not only particularly suitable for depicting the cross-border entanglements of political discourses. More than ever, their analysis will be indispensable for drawing early conclusions about the normative design and regulation of political public spheres in a global context.

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# SKANDALI U GLOBALNOM SELU: NEČUVENA POVIJEST MEĐUNARODNE POLITIKE

Steffen Burkhardt

**SAŽETAK** *Specifične karakteristike političkih skandala u globalnom kontekstu prate povijesnu evoluciju međunarodnih komunikacijskih tehnologija i medijskih sustava. Ovaj članak ispituje razvoj političkih skandala kroz odabrane skandalozne događaje u globalnom kontekstu. Globalna evolucija skandala odvijala se u tri faze: 1) pisano umnožavanje morala stvorilo je uvjete za međunarodna izvješća o političkim skandalima; 2) uspostava međunarodnoga medijskog sustava transformirala je političke skandale u sastavni dio globalnih javnih sfera; 3) digitalizacija skandala na internetu izvršila je moralni pritisak na globalnu politiku – što je rezultiralo stalnim i sveprisutnim međunarodnim diskursima skandala. Digitalizacija političkih skandala dolazi, s jedne strane, uz gubitak novinarskih „vratarata“, manipulacije u javnoj sferi koje su posljedice vremena postistine, utjecaj iz inozemstva i rizik od društvenih nemira. S druge strane, pruža priliku za bolje razumijevanje mogućnosti i ograničenja globalizacije.*

## KLJUČNE RIJEČI

POVIJEST MEDIJA, POVIJEST SKANDALA, POVIJESNI SKANDALI, DIGITALIZACIJA, GLOBALIZACIJA

Bilješka o autoru \_\_\_\_\_

**Steffen Burkhardt** :: HAW Hamburg, Odsjek za informacije i medijsku komunikaciju ::  
steffen.burkhardt@haw-hamburg.de