

# PARTISANSHIP AND ELECTORAL ACCOUNTABILITY: EVIDENCE FROM THE UK EXPENSES SCANDAL

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Why do voters support corrupt politicians? One reason is that voters care about both corruption and partisan control of government; the more voters care about which party wins, the less they can deter individual wrongdoing. I highlight this tradeoff in the 2009 UK expenses scandal, showing that electoral accountability was less effective in constituencies where the partisan stakes of the local contest were higher: not only did corrupt MPs in these constituencies suffer smaller punishments, but these MPs were also more likely to be implicated in the scandal in the first place. The findings point to an under-appreciated consequence of partisanship (and underlying causes such as strong party systems and polarization at the elite or mass level) for the electoral control of politicians.

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Electoral competition is thought to provide an important check to political corruption (Rose-Ackerman, 1999), and indeed cross-country regressions indicate that durable democracy is associated with lower corruption levels (Treisman, 2000; Montinola and Jackman, 2002). Still, corruption persists to some extent in all democracies and is viewed as widespread in a few such as Italy, India, and the United States in the Gilded Age. What explains this persistence, especially when we focus on varieties of corruption (such as the theft of public resources) that benefit the politician but typically hurt almost every citizen?

One answer formalized by political agency models (e.g. Ferejohn, 1986; Fearon, 1999; Besley, 2006) is that corruption persists because it is hard to detect, but informational problems can only go so far in explaining the persistence of corruption in democracies. Politicians who are widely believed to have engaged in corrupt behavior have been shown in numerous studies to suffer very modest electoral penalties (e.g. Reed, 1999; Chang, Golden and Hill, 2010; Peters and Welch, 1980; Welch and Hibbing, 1997). The question is why voters – all of whom would presumably prefer to be governed by non-corrupt politicians – would fail to remove incumbents who are known to be corrupt.

The explanation I emphasize in this paper is that even when voters unanimously prefer non-corrupt politicians, they disagree about other aspects of politics, such as which party should be in power; in many situations, their ability to deter corruption is undermined by their determination to achieve other political goals. My focus is on the way in which partisanship, which I define as the strength of voters' party preferences, undermines electoral accountability. In the case of corruption, this means that voters' partisan attachments make them less responsive to corruption scandals implicating incumbent politicians, and this in turn makes incumbents more likely to be implicated in corruption scandals. More broadly, the idea is that partisanship makes voters less responsive to politicians' performance (e.g. their management of the economy (Powell and Whitten, 1993; Anderson, 2000; Hellwig and Samuels, 2008; Kayser and Wlezien, 2011)), and this in turn makes politicians less likely to exert effort toward performing well.

As an empirical application of this idea, I focus on the 2009 UK parliamentary expenses

scandal, in which dozens of MPs were revealed to have improperly used public money and, a year later, faced voters who (according to survey data) remained angry at the reported abuses. To capture variation in the degree of partisanship across electoral constituencies, I take advantage of the fact that three major parties compete for seats in UK elections, with the locally relevant parties varying across constituencies. I argue based on survey evidence that, in the 2010 election on which I focus, strategic voters viewed the partisan stakes of the local constituency race as substantially higher in Labour-vs-Conservative battlegrounds than in constituencies in which a Liberal Democrat faced either a Labour or Conservative opponent. Consistent with this and with the idea that partisanship undermines electoral accountability, I show that incumbents who were implicated in the expenses scandal were punished less heavily in the subsequent election in Labour-vs-Conservative battlegrounds than in less partisan two-way contests, and (perhaps more significantly) incumbents in Labour-vs-Conservative battlegrounds were more likely to be implicated in the expenses scandal in the first place; this suggests that incumbents who expected to face more partisan re-election contests were more willing to abuse their expensing privileges because they anticipated that the electorate would be more permissive. I thus provide evidence of an inverse relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability not just in the behavior of voters but also in the behavior of incumbent politicians.

In highlighting the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability, I build on political agency models such as Persson and Tabellini (2000, chapter 4), Besley (2006, chapter 3), and Ashworth and Bueno de Mesquita (2009) in which the electoral control of politicians is undermined by voters' partisan preferences.<sup>1</sup> The idea that partisanship undermines electoral accountability appears in several areas of empirical research as well. Scholars of comparative politics have highlighted the tradeoff between holding parties accountable and holding individuals accountable (Carey, 2003), although much of this work approaches this tradeoff from the opposite perspective: Reed (1994), Samuels

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<sup>1</sup>Myerson (1993) makes a similar point from a different perspective, showing that coordination problems among partisan voters can lead to the success of corrupt parties even when non-corrupt substitutes are available, especially in plurality systems. Political agency models typically obviate coordination problems by giving voters only binary choices (e.g. incumbent vs. challenger).

(2002), and Golden (2003), for example, emphasize that an excessive focus on individual performance undermines party accountability. Scholars of voting behavior in a variety of contexts implicitly or explicitly make the related point that voters who cast ballots based on ethnicity are less responsive to politicians' performance or policy proposals (e.g. Kaufmann, 2004; Lindberg and Morrison, 2008; Wantchekon, 2003). Several studies have provided cross-national regression results consistent with the idea that partisanship undermines electoral accountability (e.g. Treisman, 2003; Persson, Tabellini and Trebbi, 2003; Gawande, Krishna and Olarreaga, 2009), and a recent paper by Kayser and Wlezien (2011) combines survey evidence and voting outcomes to show that economic voting appears more strongly among voters with weaker partisan attachments.

I contribute to this literature in two principal ways. First, I offer a more complete picture of how partisanship affects the whole chain of electoral accountability from vote choice to politician behavior: while previous work highlights either the link between partisanship and voters' willingness to punish politicians (e.g. Kayser and Wlezien, 2011; Rundquist, Strom and Peters, 1977) or the link between partisanship and the behavior of politicians (e.g. Treisman, 2003; Persson, Tabellini and Trebbi, 2003), I show both in a single setting. Second, I adopt a novel approach to estimating the effects of partisanship on political outcomes that has clear advantages over existing approaches. The analysis in Kayser and Wlezien (2011), for example, is based on regressions linking citizens' reported partisanship to their voting behavior. This is a sensible approach to the problem, but it leaves open questions about what unobserved factors explain citizens' partisanship and whether some of those factors may also affect their voting behavior.<sup>2</sup> In this paper, variation in partisanship comes from variation in the local political environment, not from variation in voter attitudes *per se*. While this approach is of course not immune to concerns about omitted variable bias, it yields evidence that corroborates and complements existing research while addressing some of the shortcomings of that work.

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<sup>2</sup>For example, it is possible that voters who consume more or different news are less partisan as a result, and this news consumption explains the higher sensitivity of less partisan voters to economic factors. Note that Kayser and Wlezien (2011) is nevertheless the most convincing piece of empirical work on these questions of which I am aware.

It should be noted that my findings, although consistent with standard political agency models, are somewhat surprising in the context on which I focus. The conventional view of British politics is that voters are almost wholly unresponsive to the attributes or performance of individual candidates, casting votes on a partisan basis instead (e.g. Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina, 1984; Cox, 1987; Gaines, 1998). Along with Curtice, Fisher and Ford (2010), Johnston and Pattie (2012), and Vivyan, Wagner and Tarlov (2012), I challenge that view by showing that British voters took account of incumbents' actions in the expenses scandal and responded accordingly.<sup>3</sup> I also go beyond other analyses of the expenses scandal not only by providing an electoral explanation of which MPs were implicated in the scandal but also by showing how voters' response to the scandal varied by constituency type; in doing so, I provide evidence that, consistent with speculation by Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1984), Norton and Wood (1990), Green (2007), and Vivyan and Wagner (2012), ideological convergence among British parties is likely to make voters more attentive to the individual performance of MPs and party leaders.

## I. FRAMEWORK

I begin with a simple decision-theoretic model illustrating the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability as explored in this paper. Candidates have two features that are relevant to voters: a party and a perceived level of corruption. Voter  $i$  derives utility  $u^i(p_I) - c_I$  from the election of candidate  $I$ , with  $p_I$  denoting the candidate's party and  $c_I$  the candidate's perceived corruption level.<sup>4</sup> Given incumbent candidate  $I$  and challenger  $C$ , and normalizing such that the perceived corruption level of the challenger is 0,

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<sup>3</sup>My findings thus relate to work by Cain, Ferejohn and Fiorina (1984); Norton and Wood (1990); Norris, Vallance and Lovenduski (1992); Gaines (1998) who study the relevance of candidate characteristics in British parliamentary elections. According to my findings, this should vary by constituency type, which is not considered in any of these studies.

<sup>4</sup>In the context of a parliamentary election, a voter may care about the party of her local MP for various reasons: perhaps she has preferences about national policy and thus cares about what party/coalition governs; perhaps she has preferences about the MP's local constituency service and believes that an MP from a given party is more or less likely to pursue the right priorities; perhaps she simply derives consumption value from being represented by an MP whose ideology is closer to her own.

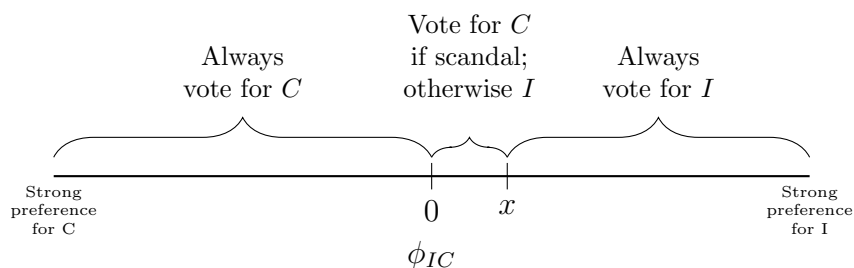
voter  $i$  will cast a ballot for the incumbent rather than the challenger if

$$u^i(p_I) - u^i(p_C) \geq c_I. \tag{1}$$

In this paper, “partisanship” refers to the magnitude of the left-hand side of this equation – the strength of a voter’s preference between the incumbent and challenger on partisan grounds. Equation 1 simply formalizes the insight that, for a given level of incumbent corruption, only voters with a sufficient level of partisan preference in favor of the incumbent’s party will support the incumbent.

Suppose that the incumbent is implicated in a corruption scandal, such that  $c_I$  changes from 0 to  $x$ . Two important points emerge from this simple framework. First, the voters who punish the incumbent are those with the weakest preference for  $I$ ’s party. In particular, define  $\phi_{IC}^i \equiv u^i(p_I) - u^i(p_C)$  as voter  $i$ ’s partisan preferences over candidates  $I$  and  $C$ ; voters who punish the incumbent are those with  $\phi_{IC}^i \in [0, x)$ , as depicted in Figure 1. Second, the degree of overall electoral punishment depends on the proportion of voters who fall into this category, i.e. who have relatively weak partisan preferences between the two parties (and lean toward the incumbent’s party).

Figure 1: Vote choice as a function of voter partisanship ( $\phi_{IC}$ ) and incumbent corruption ( $x$ )



NOTE: Only voters who narrowly support candidate  $I$ ’s party (those with partisan preferences in the segment between 0 and  $x$ ) can be expected to defect to candidate  $C$  if candidate  $I$  is involved in a scandal.

This framework also has implications for the behavior of incumbents. Suppose there is an action that incumbent politicians can take that yields private rewards but, if publicly exposed, would be viewed by voters as corrupt. Given that (as shown above) the electoral

punishment for corruption is smaller when fewer voters are roughly indifferent on partisan grounds, we should expect strategic incumbents to be more likely to take the corrupt action when voters have stronger partisan preferences.

The framework thus implies three main hypotheses that in principle can be tested by examining episodes of corruption:

1. The electoral consequences of a corruption scandal are smaller when voters have stronger partisan preferences.
2. The individual voters who punish a corrupt incumbent are voters with a weak partisan preference for the incumbent's party.
3. The propensity of strategic politicians to engage in corruption is larger when voters have stronger partisan preferences.

In the next section I explain how I take advantage of the multiparty nature of British parliamentary politics to test these hypotheses in the context of the 2009 MPs' expenses scandal.

## II. RESEARCH DESIGN

The 2009 MPs' expenses scandal was an episode in which dozens of MPs were found to have abused their parliamentary expense accounts. To test the above hypotheses, I compare the electoral punishment and probability of implication across different types of constituencies where (as I show below) the partisan stakes of the contest depended on the party of the incumbent and the main challenger. This section provides background on the scandal, explains how I measure implication in the scandal, and clarifies how partisanship varies across constituency types.

### A. BACKGROUND ON THE EXPENSES SCANDAL

Since the 1970s, British MPs have been permitted to collect an allowance (known as the "Additional Costs Allowance," or ACA) to help them maintain a residence in London in

addition to their home in their constituency. It was the perceived abuse of this allowance that most directly provoked the parliamentary expenses scandal that is the focus of this paper. The total allowances received by each MP had been made public for the first time in 2004, provoking some public outcry and one academic study (Besley and Larcinese, 2011), but until the *Daily Telegraph* obtained a leaked copy of detailed records from the House of Commons Fees Office and began reporting on the information in May of 2009, the public did not know the substance of the specific items for which MPs had received reimbursement. The *Telegraph* disclosed cases of MPs being reimbursed for expensive garden improvements, MPs bending the rules to claim second-home allowances on two homes, and even MPs fraudulently submitting claims for mortgage interest payments after the mortgage had been paid. The broader British media immediately seized on the story as a major political scandal; it quickly became practically the only topic of political discussion (Renwick, Lamb and Numan, 2011; Johnston and Pattie, 2012).

As an indication that voters viewed the expenses scandal as a serious matter, monthly surveys conducted between May of 2009 and April of 2010 consistently indicated that around 90% of respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement that the MPs expenses scandal made them “very angry”; only about 8% replied that the expenses scandal was “not that important.” Perhaps more telling for electoral accountability, immediately after the scandal broke as many as 52% of surveyed voters said they would vote against the candidate from their preferred party if that candidate were found to be implicated in the scandal.<sup>5</sup>

What angered voters about MPs’ expenses abuses? Based on media coverage of the scandal, it appears that many voters believed that MPs who would request reimbursement for extravagant or fraudulent expenses would also be likely to take advantage of the public in other respects. As noted in a letter to the editor published in the weeks after the scandal broke, “Those who are cynically dishonest about expenses may carry the same attitude into

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<sup>5</sup>Ipsos MORI poll conducted in May of 2009. By March of 2010 the proportion was down to 38%. “Impact of the expenses scandal recedes,” available at <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2578/Impact-of-the-expenses-scandal-recedes.aspx>, accessed 21 September, 2011.



politics,” said one in the *Financial Times*; “As in the financial world, public life at the moment needs more morality, not less.”<sup>6</sup> George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury, made a widely-discussed statement in which he said that “what’s most worrying about this sad, sordid and scandalous affair is that it reveals an ambiguity amongst our politicians in their attitudes to public service.”<sup>7</sup> In short, voters appear to have taken the view that the scandal revealed important information about a politician’s quality or type; removing corrupt MPs from office could prevent them from further taking advantage of citizens. This view is consistent with political agency models (e.g. Fearon, 1999; Besley, 2006) in which a voter cares about politicians’ past offenses because those actions provide information about their types.

## B. VARIATION IN INCUMBENTS’ IMPLICATION IN THE EXPENSES SCANDAL

A crucial feature of the expenses scandal is that, while there was substantial criticism of the expensing system in general, most of the attention was focused on the abuses of particular individuals. The expenses scandal was a product of investigative journalism and sensational news reports, and the media were the channel through which voters learned about MPs’ abuses. The approach I use to identify which MPs were implicated in the scandal thus relies on a measure of how much media attention was devoted to an MP’s expenses. Specifically, I measure implication in the expenses scandal based on the proportion of news stories in the Google News archive mentioning an MP and her constituency during the period between the beginning the scandal and the 2010 election that also mention the word “expenses.”<sup>8</sup>

In Appendix A, I provide a variety of evidence indicating that this procedure yields a valid measure of implication in the scandal: the highest-scoring MPs are those who

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<sup>6</sup>*Financial Times*, June 8, 2009, pg. 10.

<sup>7</sup>Simon Walters, “The Speaker’s scapegoat: Official who signed off MPs’ expenses didn’t even have accountancy qualification,” *The Mail Online*, May 10, 2009.

<sup>8</sup>The exact period used was May 1, 2009, to May 5, 2010. In this period Google News captured a mix of national and local news sources. A “story” on Google News is a collection of articles on the same topic as determined by a proprietary clustering algorithm. The coding is essentially the same if the number of articles is used instead. The MP’s constituency is included both to ensure that the stories are about the MP and not about another person with the same name and to reduce the chances that a high-profile MP (such as a party leader or minister) will be marked as implicated merely because he or she comments on the expenses scandal. This approach was inspired by an unpublished paper by Fisher (2011).

were obviously highly implicated in the scandal; the measure produces high scores for MPs independently identified as “sinners” and low scores for MPs independently identified as “saints”; the measure is highly correlated with a survey-based measure of perceived implication (more so than possible alternative measures).

In the subsequent analysis I reduce the continuous 0-1 implication score to a binary indicator of implication. This is mainly for ease of interpretation, but an additional reason is that it arguably better measures voters’ perceptions of MPs’ behavior. Most of the media’s attention to the scandal focused on several dozen clearly implicated MPs. For the majority of MPs who were not implicated, variation in the implication score is essentially noise arising from, for example, stories in which the MP’s expenses are mentioned but not in a way that voters found incriminating; including this noise in the analysis is likely to lead to attenuation and possibly bias in the results. Creating a binary implication variable requires choosing a cutoff value of the implication score above which an MP is marked as “implicated”; choose a cutoff of .25 because it yields the same proportion of implicated MPs (just under one quarter) as were identified for these constituencies by Curtice, Fisher and Ford (2010) using a different approach; sensitivity analysis in Table 3 of Appendix B indicates that any cutoff of .25 or higher would produce roughly the same findings; lower cutoff values that mark larger and larger proportions of MPs as implicated produce attenuated results.

### C. VARIATION IN PARTISANSHIP ACROSS ENGLISH CONSTITUENCY CONTESTS

Given a measure of implication in the scandal, a natural approach to testing the hypotheses laid out in Section I would be to measure how the effectiveness of electoral accountability (as measured by the electoral response to implication and the rate of implication) varied between constituencies where voters held strong partisan preferences and constituencies where voters held weak partisan preferences. An obvious issue with such a comparison is that, for a fixed set of parties, the strength of voters’ partisan preferences is likely to be correlated with other aspects of voters’ political preferences, such as their tolerance for corruption; it would thus be difficult to disentangle the effect of partisanship *per se* on

electoral accountability from the effect of other aspects of voters' preferences.

My approach is to take advantage of the multiparty nature of British parliamentary elections. The three main parties in British politics are the Labour Party, the Liberal Democrat Party, and the Conservative Party;<sup>9</sup> in any particular constituency, only two of these parties is likely to have a realistic chance at winning the seat. To measure the effect of partisanship on electoral accountability, I test whether electoral accountability is less effective in constituencies where the two locally relevant parties induce stronger partisan preferences in the electorate.

Survey data shows that voters have stronger preferences between the Labour and Conservative parties than they do between the Liberal Democrats and either Labour or the Conservatives; this is consistent with the common view that the Liberal Democrats represent a centrist alternative to the left-of-center Labour Party and the right-of-center Conservatives (Russell and Fieldhouse, 2005; Schofield and Sened, 2006; Quinn and Clements, 2010).<sup>10</sup> The left-most column of Table 1 reports, for the 2010 pre-campaign British Election Study survey, the proportion of respondents who were basically indifferent between a given pair of parties (top three rows) as well as the difference in reported feelings toward a given pair of parties (bottom three rows). About half of respondents reported being basically indifferent between the Liberal Democrats and either Labour or the Conservatives, compared to about 3/10 for the comparison of Labour and the Conservatives; the average difference in feelings (on a 0-10 scale) was at least 50% higher for the Labour-Conservative comparison than for the other two party pairs. The null hypothesis that these differences are zero can be soundly rejected ( $t > 50$ ).

Suppose it were possible to experimentally vary which pairs of parties compete in a given constituency. Given a set of Labour incumbent MPs, for example, we could randomly vary

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<sup>9</sup>Other parties compete, but in the English constituencies on which I focus no other party is viewed as having a serious chance of winning. I exclude Brighton Pavilion, where the Green Party won its first parliamentary seat in 2010.

<sup>10</sup>Some commentators adopt a two-dimensional view of British politics in which the Liberal Democrats are in the center of economic issues but liberal on social issues. See, however, Benoit and Laver (2006), who place the Liberal Democrats to the left of Labour on both economic and social issues. My claims about partisanship in this paper rely primarily on survey data about voters' party preferences rather than ideological locations of the parties.

Table 1: Attitudes toward the major parties, by constituency type

Party pair	Constituency type			
	All	Lab-Con	Lab-Lib Dem	Lib Dem-Con
<i>Proportion of respondents expressing indifference</i>				
Lab & Con	0.30	<b>0.30</b>	0.33	0.28
Lab & Lib Dem	0.50	0.51	<b>0.49</b>	0.45
Lib Dem & Con	0.47	0.47	0.43	<b>0.44</b>
<i>Average gap in reported feeling about party pair</i>				
Lab & Con	4.47	<b>4.53</b>	4.24	4.60
Lab & Lib Dem	2.86	2.82	<b>2.89</b>	3.12
Lib Dem & Con	3.12	3.11	3.36	<b>3.35</b>
Respondents	12,271	3,484	499	1,385

*Note:* BES respondents are asked to evaluate each of the major parties on a scale from 0-10, where 0 is “strongly dislike” and 10 is “strongly like.” The top three rows of the table show the proportion of respondents (by constituency type) who place a given pair of parties within 2 points of each other. The bottom three rows show the average difference between respondents’ evaluation of a given pair of parties (again, by constituency type). The bold numbers report attitudes of respondents toward the locally competitive parties in their own constituency.

whether the MP faces a Liberal Democrat or Conservative challenger. In light of the party preferences reported in the left column of Table 1, we would expect voters to have stronger partisan preferences between the candidates in constituencies where the Labour incumbent faced a Conservative challenger than in constituencies where the Labour incumbent faced a Liberal Democrat challenger; in light of the logic outlined in Section I, we would also expect electoral accountability to be less effective in these constituencies.

Obviously, no researcher can experimentally vary party match-ups in this way, but it is possible to carry out an analogous observational study based on variation in which parties are competitive across constituencies. Although the three major parties compete in all English constituencies, many constituency races are effectively two-way contests; studies of British politics often classify constituencies based on which two parties are locally competitive, with e.g. “Lab-Con” referring to constituencies where observers expect either the Labour candidate or the Conservative candidate to win (e.g. Norris and Wlezien, 2005; Pattie and Johnston, 2010). To the extent that (some) voters in constituencies with two-way

contests vote as if there were only two parties on the ballot, and to the extent that voters in all constituency types have stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between the Liberal Democrats and either of the other two parties, we would expect partisanship to vary across types of constituencies as it does in the hypothetical experiment above. Of course, constituency types are not randomly assigned, but by being attentive to possible confounding factors we may still be able to draw inferences about the relationship between partisanship and electoral accountability in this context.

To implement this research design, I first identify Lab-Con, Lab-Lib Dem, and Lib Dem-Con battlegrounds from the set of English constituencies.<sup>11</sup> Using the results of the previous general election (2005), I initially focus on constituencies where exactly two parties had a reasonable chance of winning; this means excluding constituencies where all three parties were competitive as well as constituencies where one party won easily.<sup>12</sup> This leaves 225 constituencies in England with two-way contests (out of 484 without substantial boundary changes between 2005 and 2010), in 202 of which the incumbent had not announced retirement before the expenses scandal hit.<sup>13</sup> Of these, 133 are Lab-Con battlegrounds, 20 are Lab-Lib Dem, and 49 Lib Dem-Con.

The right-most three columns of Table 1 report measures of party preferences broken down by constituency type. The numbers indicate that, in constituencies with two-way contests as in the whole of England, voters have stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between the Liberal Democrats and either of the other two parties. In fact, voters' preferences over the three major parties appear to be remarkably similar across constituency types; for example, about 30% of voters express indifference between Labour and the Conservatives in each constituency type. Importantly for my

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<sup>11</sup>I focus on England mainly because national parties (Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru) complicate analysis in Scotland and Wales, and party competition is even less comparable in Northern Ireland. There is in principle no reason why my approach could not be extended to these or other settings in which party match-ups vary across constituencies.

<sup>12</sup>In particular, I exclude constituencies where (in three-party vote share) the first and second party were separated by more than .2 or the second and third party were separated by less than .1. In Table 5 of Appendix B I show that the results depend on focusing on competitive contests but are robust to variation in the particular cutoffs employed.

<sup>13</sup>I exclude constituencies in which the MP had announced retirement before the scandal because MPs in these constituencies would likely not be affected by the electoral prospects in their constituency.

research design, voters in Lab-Con constituencies have stronger preferences between the locally-competitive parties than do voters in Lab-Lib Dem constituencies or Lib Dem-Con constituencies (as shown by the numbers in bold). It is this variation in the strength of voters' preferences over the locally-competitive parties that produces the variation in partisanship on which I base my analysis.

To be clear, any difference in partisanship between Lab-Con contests and others depends not just on voters having stronger preferences between the locally-competitive parties but also on voters *conditioning their vote choices* on which parties are locally competitive. In other words, at least some voters must be strategic or tactical (e.g. Alvarez and Nagler, 2000; Myatt, 2007; Kawai and Watanabe, 2013). If all voters are sincere, meaning that they vote for their favorite candidate regardless of how their vote might affect the outcome, then the partisan stakes do not vary by constituency type and therefore neither should electoral accountability. Implicitly, then, the subsequent analysis in this paper depends not just on party preferences following the pattern described in Table 1 and voters being less responsive to corruption when their party preferences are stronger but also on there being a sufficient proportion of strategic voters who condition their vote choice on the local electoral context.<sup>14</sup>

### III. PARTISANSHIP AND ELECTORAL PUNISHMENT: AGGREGATE-LEVEL ANALYSIS

If we accept that voters hold stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between either party and the Liberal Democrats, and if some voters vote strategically, then we should expect to see less effective electoral accountability in Lab-Con battlegrounds than elsewhere. In this section I test that prediction by focusing on the electoral punishment suffered by MPs implicated in the expenses scandal.

To start, I measure the baseline level of punishment, with results reported in Table

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<sup>14</sup>There is considerable evidence of strategic voting in the British electorate (e.g. Cain, 1978; Alvarez, Boehmke and Nagler, 2006; Myatt, 2007). For example, Alvarez, Boehmke and Nagler (2006)'s analysis of the 1987 and 1997 general elections suggests that about half of voters whose preferred party was predicted to finish last in the constituency strategically voted for another party. In recent work, Kawai and Watanabe (2013) infer using a structural model that about 3/4 of Japanese voters are strategic in the sense that if their preferred party were hopeless in the constituency they would vote for another party.

2. The dependent variable here is the (three-party) vote share received by the incumbent in 2010; on the right-hand side is an indicator for whether the incumbent was implicated in the expenses scandal, along with controls for the incumbent’s vote share and margin of victory in 2005, an indicator for Lab-Con constituency, and dummy variables for the incumbent’s party. In addition, in columns 2-4 the regression controls for additional constituency variables: the region of England in which the constituency is located (column 2), interactions between region and incumbent’s party (column 3), and a set of characteristics describing the incumbent (years of experience in the House of Commons, age (broken into four categories), and position in the cabinet or shadow cabinet) (column 4).<sup>15</sup> According to Table 2, implication in the expenses scandal in these constituencies cost the average incumbent about 2.5 percentage points in the 2010 election. The point estimate is quite stable across different specifications. Based on the coefficient estimates on “Lab-Con” there is no evidence that incumbents did systematically better or worse on average in Labour-vs-Conservative battlegrounds.

I next test whether the punishment received by corrupt incumbents was smaller in Lab-Con constituencies, where (strategic) voters would on average have stronger partisan preferences about the local contest. The regressions (reported in Table 3, columns 1-4) are the same as those reported in Table 2, except that here I include an interaction between implication and the “Lab-Con” dummy in order to test whether implication in the expenses scandal was less costly to the incumbent in this constituency type. The results are highly consistent with the idea that voters were more forgiving of corrupt behavior when they perceived greater partisan stakes. With the interaction included, the “Implicated” coefficient now measures the electoral penalty paid by incumbents in constituencies with

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<sup>15</sup>I restrict attention to constituencies in which the incumbent ran for re-election, and thus the incumbent’s implication in the expenses scandal would be particularly relevant to voters. As shown in Larcinese and Sircar (2012), voters appear not to have punished the party of the incumbent in constituencies where an implicated incumbent did not run. Implicated MPs who stood down tended to be those whose abuses had been most egregious; because those who remain were relatively mildly implicated, the electoral punishments I detect are probably smaller than they would be without retirements. Crucially, in separate analysis I do not find that implicated incumbents in Lab-Con battlegrounds chose to retire at a higher rate, which addresses the possible concern that voters were less harsh on implicated MPs in those constituencies because the ones who remained were less heavily implicated.

Table 2: Incumbent vote share as a function of implication in expenses scandal and controls

Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Implicated	-.024** (.009)	-.025** (.008)	-.026** (.008)	-.026** (.009)
Lab-Con	-.011 (.009)	-.013 (.009)	-.012 (.010)	-.011 (.010)
Vote share, 2005	.662*** (.156)	.627*** (.149)	.625*** (.137)	.518*** (.153)
Margin, 2005	.164 (.102)	.163 <sup>†</sup> (.098)	.158 <sup>†</sup> (.084)	.257** (.095)
Labour incumbent	-.117*** (.006)	-.122*** (.007)	-.114*** (.019)	-.114*** (.019)
Lib Dem incumbent	-.035** (.012)	-.033** (.011)	.006 (.013)	.007 (.013)
Constant	.216** (.066)	.222*** (.064)	.204*** (.059)	.253*** (.065)
Region dummies:		✓	✓	✓
Region-party interactions:			✓	✓
Incumbent characteristics:				✓
N	171	171	171	171
Adj $R^2$	.732	.737	.759	.763

*Note:* The dependent variable for each OLS model is the vote share of the incumbent party in the 2010 general election. White's heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Guide to significance codes: \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ ; \*\* indicates  $.001 < p < .01$ ; \* indicates  $.01 < p < .05$ ; and <sup>†</sup> indicates  $.05 < p < .1$ .



Table 3: Incumbent vote share as a function of constituency type, implication and controls

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sample:	All English constituencies				South	Ex. LD
Implicated	-.060*** (.012)	-.058*** (.014)	-.061*** (.013)	-.061*** (.016)	-.055** (.018)	-.050** (.018)
Lab-Con	-.015† (.009)	-.016† (.009)	-.016 (.010)	-.016 (.010)	-.035 (.022)	-.016 (.011)
Interaction	.046** (.016)	.042* (.017)	.044** (.016)	.046* (.019)	.043* (.021)	.035 (.021)
Vote share, 2005	.672*** (.154)	.633*** (.147)	.627*** (.135)	.517*** (.149)	-.061 (.240)	.383* (.163)
Margin, 2005	.164 (.102)	.165† (.098)	.162† (.084)	.266** (.095)	.367* (.160)	.302** (.101)
Labour incumbent	-.116*** (.006)	-.122*** (.007)	-.116*** (.019)	-.117*** (.019)	-.098*** (.023)	-.106*** (.018)
Lib Dem incumbent	-.037** (.011)	-.035** (.011)	.005 (.012)	.006 (.013)	.010 (.013)	
Constant	.214** (.065)	.223*** (.063)	.207*** (.058)	.256*** (.063)	.478*** (.095)	.291*** (.066)
Region dummies:		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region-party interactions:			✓	✓	✓	✓
Incumbent characteristics:				✓	✓	✓
N	171	171	171	171	52	143
Adj $R^2$	.736	.740	.763	.767	.796	.745

*Note:* The dependent variable for each OLS model is the vote share of the incumbent party in the 2010 general election. White's heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Guide to significance codes: \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ ; \*\* indicates  $.001 < p < .01$ ; \* indicates  $.01 < p < .05$ ; and † indicates  $.05 < p < .1$ .

relatively low partisanship – those in which a Liberal Democrat is either the incumbent or the main challenger. Across models, the estimated effect of implication in these constituencies is around 6 percentage points, which is over twice as large as the average effect for the whole sample. The interaction term, which measures the difference in the penalty suffered by corrupt incumbents in partisan contests as compared to less-partisan contests, is statistically significant at the .05 level in models 1-4 and at the .01 level in models 1 and 3.

The lighter punishment for implication in Lab-Con constituencies is consistent with the framework in Section I, given that voters appear to have stronger preferences between Labour and the Conservatives than between other party pairs. Of course, other differences between Lab-Con constituencies and other constituencies could explain this pattern: for example, it is possible that voters in Lab-Con constituencies simply care less about corruption in an absolute sense (not just relative to party), perhaps because of differences in local political preferences that also account for which parties are locally competitive. The inclusion of covariates in regressions in Table 3 addresses this concern only partially.<sup>16</sup> In the next section I address these concerns by analyzing survey data and controlling for respondent characteristics; here I carry out subset analysis, reported in the last two columns of Table 3.

In column 5 of Table 3 I replicate the analysis from column 4 while focusing only on constituencies located in the south and south west of England. One possible explanation of the lower degree of accountability in Lab-Con constituencies is that voters in the region of England where the Liberal Democrats are stronger may generally be more responsive to corruption, for example because of the region's relative prosperity and proximity to London. I therefore test whether the same relationship between constituency type and electoral punishment persists when we look within that region only. The interaction term remains large and is significant at the .05 level, indicating that even within the south implicated incumbents were punished less severely in Lab-Con constituencies.

Another alternative explanation for the lower responsiveness of voters to corruption in Lab-Con constituencies is that Liberal Democrat incumbents may be on average more honest than politicians from other parties, perhaps because of differences in candidate recruitment and selection or party culture. If that were the case, we may find a lower response to corruption in Lab-Con constituencies simply because voters are less surprised by a corrupt Labour or Conservative incumbent or because they expect the same behavior from

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<sup>16</sup>The inclusion of region dummies, for example, addresses differences across regions in the average level of support for incumbent candidates, but it does not address region-level factors that might produce differences in the responsiveness of voters to corruption.

the main challenger in those constituencies. Consistent with these alternative explanations, a survey held before the 2010 elections indicates that the average voter held a higher opinion of the honesty of the Liberal Democrats than of other parties.<sup>17</sup> To partially address this possible alternative explanation, in column 6 of Table 3 I repeat the analysis excluding constituencies in which the incumbent was a Liberal Democrat. In this subset of constituencies, the interaction term is smaller than in the full sample and borderline significant at the .1 level (p-val = .1); additional analysis applying models 1-3 on the reduced sample yields an interaction term that remains significant at the .05 level.

#### IV. PARTISANSHIP AND ELECTORAL PUNISHMENT: INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL ANALYSIS

I now turn to individual survey data. This allows me to test the second hypothesis laid out in Section I, which is that the voters who punish a corrupt incumbent should be those who, in the absence of corruption, would weakly support the incumbent. Because the survey data allows me to include individual-level characteristics as control variables, this approach also provides another way to address concerns about omitted variable bias in the aggregate analysis just presented.

In looking at individual voting intention data, the most straightforward implication of the analysis in Section I is that we should not see e.g. Conservative voters punishing corrupt Labour incumbents: whether or not the Labour incumbent is implicated in the scandal, a Conservative voter would be expected to support the Conservative candidate (or the Liberal Democrat, if the Conservative candidate is hopeless). If we restrict attention to Labour and Conservative identifiers, then, we should expect voters to punish the incumbent (i.e. to vote for the incumbent if that incumbent is not implicated and not otherwise) only when the incumbent is from their own party.<sup>18</sup> In line with the analysis of the previous section, we would expect these voters to be especially likely to punish an own-party incumbent

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<sup>17</sup>A *Times*/Populus poll in September of 2009 asked respondents whether they viewed each of the main parties as “honest and principled”; the Liberal Democrats scored the highest by far, with 57% of voters agreeing that the label applied to that party (compared to 41% for the Conservatives and 28% for Labour).

<sup>18</sup>An additional possibility, not explored here, is that some Labour and Conservative supporters would vote strategically for a Liberal Democrat incumbent if that incumbent is not implicated in the scandal but would vote sincerely for their own party’s candidate if the incumbent is implicated in the scandal.

when the challenger is a Liberal Democrat, given most voters' apparent view of the Liberal Democrats as a more acceptable middle-ground alternative.

The implications are somewhat more subtle when we think about Liberal Democrat supporters. Under the assumption that the Liberal Democrats are a centrist alternative between Labour and the Conservatives, Liberal Democrat voters are actually more likely to be indifferent between the candidates on partisan grounds in a Lab-Con constituency than in a constituency where a Lib Dem candidate is competitive; when a Liberal Democrat is the relevant challenger, a Liberal Democrat voter will vote for that challenger whether or not the incumbent is corrupt. Thus it seems that Liberal Democrats would be responsive to corruption in Lab-Con contests and in contests where a Liberal Democrat is the incumbent, but not in contests where the Liberal Democrat is the main challenger (i.e. Lab-Lib Dem and Lib Dem-Con constituencies with a Labour or Conservative incumbent).

In Table 4 I test these predictions about how electoral punishment would depend on constituency type differently for different types of voters. In all columns, I regress the BES respondent's vote choice (1 if voted for the incumbent, 0 otherwise) on an indicator for whether the respondent believes the incumbent "claimed expense money to which they were not entitled" ("Overclaimed"), an indicator for the constituency type, and the interaction, along with an indicator for the incumbent's party; in even-numbered columns I include a set of respondent covariates: income, education, age, strength of party identification, political interest ("very", "somewhat", "not very", and "not at all" interested in the general election), and an indicator for whether the respondent thinks that MPs who are implicated in the scandal should be forced to resign.<sup>19</sup>

In columns 1-4 I focus on Labour and Conservative voters (those who indicate the most positive feelings toward one of those two parties and least positive toward the other), and I define constituency type as above (i.e. Lab-Con vs. other). In columns 1 and 2 I focus on cases where the incumbent is not from the voter's preferred party, and thus we

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<sup>19</sup>Although an estimation approach that explicitly models the binary outcome may be preferred as a predictive measure both here and in the next section, the substantive results are the same. In additional analysis I find that voters' attitudes toward the expenses scandal did not vary significantly by constituency type, nor were Liberal Democrat voters more upset than others about the scandal.

Table 4: Probability of voting for the incumbent as a function of implication in expenses scandal, constituency type, and individual-level controls for subsets of survey respondents

Sample: Model:	Resp. L. or C.; incumbent not same		Resp. L. or C.; incumbent same		Respondent LD	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Overclaimed	0.006 (0.046)	0.026 (0.048)	-0.103 (0.08)	-0.097 (0.069)	-0.139** (0.042)	-0.144** (0.045)
Lab-Con	-0.011 (0.019)	-0.009 (0.024)	0.009 (0.027)	0.011 (0.032)		
Overclaimed $\times$ Lab-Con	-0.013 (0.047)	-0.029 (0.051)	0.122 (0.086)	0.136 <sup>†</sup> (0.08)		
Lib Dem challenger					-0.276*** (0.041)	-0.297*** (0.043)
Overclaimed $\times$ LD chall.					0.155* (0.064)	0.144* (0.068)
Constant	0.035 <sup>†</sup> (0.021)	0.273** (0.093)	0.848*** (0.021)	0.418*** (0.112)	0.388*** (0.033)	0.298* (0.116)
Incumbent party	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Respondent covariates		✓		✓		✓
Obs.	1213	888	950	719	1033	815
Adj. $R^2$	0.143	0.144	0.004	0.058	0.053	0.064

*Note:* Dependent variable is 1 if British Election Survey (pre-election CIPS) respondent voted for the incumbent. “Overclaimed” is 1 if the respondent indicated that his/her MP “claimed expense money to which they were not entitled”. See text for details on the covariates. Guide to significance codes: \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ ; \*\* indicates  $.001 < p < .01$ ; \* indicates  $.01 < p < .05$ ; and <sup>†</sup> indicates  $.05 < p < .1$ .

do not expect the voter's vote choice to depend on the incumbent's implication. Indeed, this is what I find: the voter is so unlikely to vote for an unimplicated incumbent that implication cannot possibly have an effect on the voter's behavior. In columns 3 and 4 I focus on cases where the incumbent is from the same party as the voter, which is the situation in which we expect punishment that depends on constituency type, and again this is what we find: the point estimates on "Overclaimed" indicate that when the challenger is a Liberal Democrat, a Labour or Conservative respondent is around 10% less likely to vote for a same-party incumbent if that incumbent overclaimed; the interaction indicates that this punishment disappears when the main challenger is a Conservative or Labour candidate. The interaction term is significant at the .1 level when we include individual-level covariates (with standard errors clustered at the constituency level). Although the vote choice result at the individual level is clearly noisy and thus the results are not strong from the standpoint of statistical significance, the results are consistent with the hypotheses and (given the inclusion of individual covariates) suggest that the aggregate relationship between punishment and constituency type presented in the previous section is not merely due to differences between voters in Lab-Con constituencies and voters in other constituency types.

In columns 5 and 6 I conduct a similar test for Liberal Democrat respondents. As noted above, the prediction is that Liberal Democrats should be less responsive to corruption when the main challenger is a Liberal Democrat than in other constituency types. This is exactly what the regressions in these columns suggest: the coefficient on "Overclaimed" indicates that in cases where the Liberal Democrat candidate is not the main challenger, Liberal Democrat respondents are almost 15% less likely to vote for the incumbent if that incumbent is implicated in the scandal; the interaction indicates that their vote choice does not respond to implication when the Liberal Democrat candidate is the main challenger, with the interaction significant at the .05 level.

## V. PARTISANSHIP AND IMPLICATION IN THE EXPENSES SCANDAL

Finally, I turn to the question of whether incumbent politicians in more partisan environments take advantage of voters' relatively low responsiveness to corruption. Table 5 reports the coefficient estimates for a linear probability model in which the dependent variable is 1 if the incumbent was implicated in the expenses scandal and 0 otherwise.<sup>20</sup> Columns 1-4 report coefficient estimates with a progressively larger set of control variables included. The analysis provides suggestive evidence that incumbents were in fact more likely to be implicated in the expenses scandal when they expected to face a more partisan contest in 2010. As more covariates are added to the model across columns 1 to 4, the size of the point estimate increases, and in the full model with all interactions included (column 4) the point estimate is significant at the .05 level. Substantively, the results suggest that the probability of being implicated in the scandal was as much as twice as high in the more partisan constituencies. (The proportion of implicated MPs in the constituencies analyzed in these models is 33/202 or about 15%.)

In the last two columns of Table 5 I carry out subset analysis that addresses two possible alternative explanations of the results. To address the possibility that the higher implication rate in Lab-Con constituencies is due to regional differences in voter or MP behavior that happen to line up with the Liberal Democrats' regional pattern of support, in column 5 (under the heading "South") I repeat the analysis focusing on the south and south west of England; the point estimate is similar to the whole-sample analysis but the coefficient on "Lab-Con" is no longer a significant predictor of implication, which may not be surprising given only 60 data points. To address the possibility that the implication rate was lower in Lab-Con constituencies simply because Lib Dem incumbents were different in some way, I also replicate the analysis in the subset of constituencies where the incumbent is either Labour or Conservative (column 6, under the heading "Ex. LD"). The key coefficient and its significance are essentially unchanged.

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<sup>20</sup>Here I include constituencies in which the incumbent did not run but exclude those in which the incumbent had announced retirement before the scandal hit, because MPs who had been planning to retire would be less likely to consider the local electoral situation in deciding whether to engage in corruption.

Table 5: Implication in expenses scandal as a function of constituency type and controls

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Sample:	All English constituencies				South	Ex. LD
Lab-Con	.089 (.064)	.096 (.063)	.111 <sup>†</sup> (.065)	.156* (.071)	.079 (.165)	.154* (.072)
Margin, 2005	.221 (.410)	.407 (.395)	.387 (.407)	-.420 (.441)	.027 (.849)	-.647 (.561)
Labour incumbent	-.051 (.061)	-.029 (.062)	-.127 (.206)	-.108 (.159)	-.035 (.224)	-.104 (.156)
Lib Dem incumbent	-.115 (.070)	-.092 (.071)	-.095 (.157)	-.013 (.120)	-.001 (.123)	
Constant	.128 <sup>†</sup> (.070)	.133 (.093)	.153 (.140)	.020 (.086)	-.055 (.116)	.028 (.089)
Region dummies:		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Region-party interactions:			✓	✓	✓	✓
Incumbent characteristics:				✓	✓	✓
N	202	202	202	202	60	172
Adj $R^2$	.013	.036	-.022	.109	.080	.125

*Note:* The dependent variable for each OLS model is 1 if the incumbent MP is implicated in the expenses scandal, based on the media measure described in the text. White's heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors are shown in parentheses. Guide to significance codes: \*\*\* indicates  $p < .001$ ; \*\* indicates  $.001 < p < .01$ ; \* indicates  $.01 < p < .05$ ; and <sup>†</sup> indicates  $.05 < p < .1$ .



## VI. CONCLUSION

This paper has examined an intuitive and theoretically well-founded idea connecting partisanship and corruption: partisanship tends to make voters less responsive to corruption and other aspects of politicians' performance, which undermines the effectiveness of elections as a means to control politicians. The analysis focuses on a recent episode in which British voters punished dozens of MPs who were found to have improperly received public funds. Using both aggregate results and survey data, I show that the extent of the punishment was larger in constituencies where voters were more indifferent between the main parties in competition; I argue that in these contests, strategic voters responded more to corruption because the partisan stakes were lower. I use survey data to test predictions about which voters punish incumbents and how that punishment depended on partisan match-ups. I also show that MPs were less likely to be implicated in the scandal in less partisan contests, which suggests that politicians filing expenses claims (or parties placing politicians in constituencies) took calculated risks based partly on the electoral punishment they were likely to suffer if improper behavior were brought to light.

One contribution of the paper is that it focuses on variation in partisanship that emerges from variation in the local competitive environment in which voters find themselves. While I cannot completely rule out the possibility that Lab-Con constituencies differ in some other way that explains the lower level of electoral accountability in these places, the various robustness checks I carry out at the aggregate and individual level should assuage some of these concerns. My findings thus complement other research that studies the same link between partisanship and accountability but measures partisanship from survey responses or legislative outcomes.

Although the focus of this paper has been on a single scandal in British politics, it should be clear that the implications are much broader. Voters' partisan attachments may make them less responsive not only to corruption scandals like this one but also to policy outcomes (Gawande, Krishna and Olarreaga, 2009) and economic performance (Kayser and Wlezien, 2011). Given the effect of partisanship on electoral accountability, ongoing

changes in partisan attachments (e.g. Layman, Carsey and Horowitz, 2006; Green, 2007; Kayser and Wlezien, 2011) deserve special attention in the study of electoral accountability, as do the social, economic, and institutional causes of those changes.

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## APPENDIX A: VALIDITY OF IMPLICATION MEASURE

The implication score for MP  $i$  is

$$\text{Implication}_i = \frac{\#\text{expenses stories}_i}{\#\text{stories}_i + n_0}. \tag{A.1}$$

The factor  $n_0$  is included because MPs with very few expenses stories are unlikely to have been seriously implicated in the scandal; without such a factor, an MP who is mentioned in only one news story, which happens to mention the scandal in a general sense, would be marked as more implicated than an MP with 30 total stories, 25 of which mention his expense abuses.<sup>21</sup>

In order to calibrate and confirm the validity of the measure, MPs’ implication scores were compared against a hand-coded set of 57 MPs who were singled out by leading newspapers as particularly guilty or innocent of expenses abuses. Using this list and plausibility checks of the highest- and lowest-scoring MPs, I chose a value of 10 for  $n_0$ . (Sensitivity tests reported in Table 4 of the Appendix indicate that the results of this paper depend on using  $n_0 > 0$  but are not sensitive to the particular choice of  $n_0$ ; they also indicate that the results are essentially the same when I do away with the denominator entirely and simply use the total number of expenses stories.) As an indication that the measure in fact captures important variation in implication, the implication score very neatly separates the “saints” from the “sinners” in the hand-coded dataset: 94% (17/18) of the “sinners” had scores above .25, compared to only 7.7% (3/39) of the “saints”. A list of the ten MPs with the highest implication scores, which appears in Table 6, contains several names that anyone familiar with the scandal would expect to be marked as implicated: the top six are Margaret Moran, David Chaytor, Andrew MacKay, Julie Kirkbride, Peter Viggers, and Douglas Hogg, all of whom played leading roles. (For example, David Chaytor was imprisoned for fraudulent mortgage payment claims; Peter Viggers expensed the infamous duck house; and Douglass Hogg claimed reimbursement for hundreds of sacks of manure for his garden.) Several other notoriously implicated MPs narrowly missed the top ten, including Eliot Morley (.62), Barbara Follett (.49), Jacqui Smith (.53), and Hazel Blears (.53).

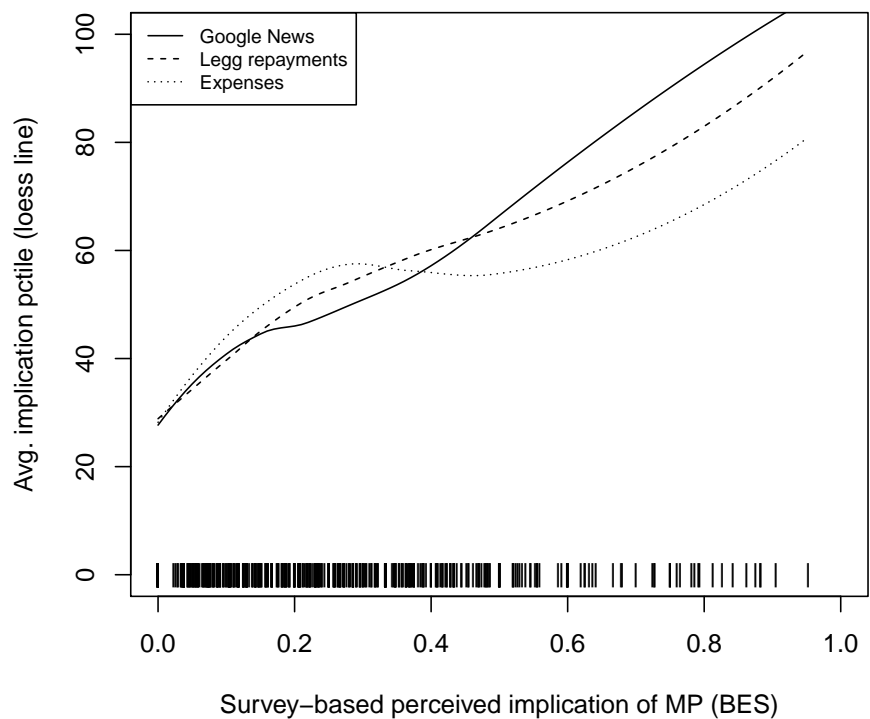
Figure 2 provides a further indication that the implication measure I employ captures relevant variation in MPs’ perceived wrongdoing. In 2010, the British Election Study asked respondents whether their own MP had “claimed expense money to which they were not entitled.” The solid line in Figure 2 depicts the relationship between the proportion of BES respondents who responded “yes” about their MP and my Google News-based implication score for that MP (converted into a percentile); it confirms that MPs who most respondents said had abused the expenses system have relatively high implication scores by my measure. The figure also shows that my measure performs better than other alternatives one might consider. One option is to measure implication by the sheer amount of money that the MP claimed in second-home expenses; another is to measure implication by the amount of money that the MP was required to repay by Sir Thomas Legg’s review of expenses claims. Figure 2 shows that these two alternate measures (dotted line and dashed line, respectively) are less closely related to survey respondents’ perceptions than mine is. The relatively high correlation of my media-based measure with survey responses makes sense both because the media was ultimately the source of voters’ information about the scandal and because media attention captures better than total expenses or even total repayments what voters found objectionable about an MP’s behavior, which was often the willingness of the MP to submit expenses that, while modest in overall cost compared to the legitimate claims of other MPs, were viewed as petty, needlessly lavish, or otherwise morally inappropriate.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Technically, the implication score can be viewed as the posterior mean of the probability parameter in a binomial model with a beta conjugate prior; the prior here involves quasi-data of zero successes and  $n_0$  failures (Gelman et al., 2004, at pp. 35–49).

<sup>22</sup>A prominent example of an MP criticized for modest expenses was wealthy Liberal Democrat MP Chris Huhne, who submitted expenses claims for cookies, teabags, and bus tickets (Gordon Rayner, “Chris Huhne, a millionaire but you buy his chocolate HobNobs: MPs’ expenses”, *The Telegraph*, May 13 2009).

Figure 2: Comparison of three possible measures of MP implication with survey-based perceived implication



*Note:* BES respondents were asked whether their MP “claimed expense money to which they are not entitled.” This figure shows the relationship (locally fit loess regression) between the proportion of respondents in a constituency who responded in the affirmative (x-axis) and the MP’s implication percentile based on three alternative ways of measuring implication (y-axis). The solid line corresponds to the measure I use; it agrees more closely than the others with what BES respondents perceived.



Table 6: Validation of media measure of implication: Most-implicated MPs

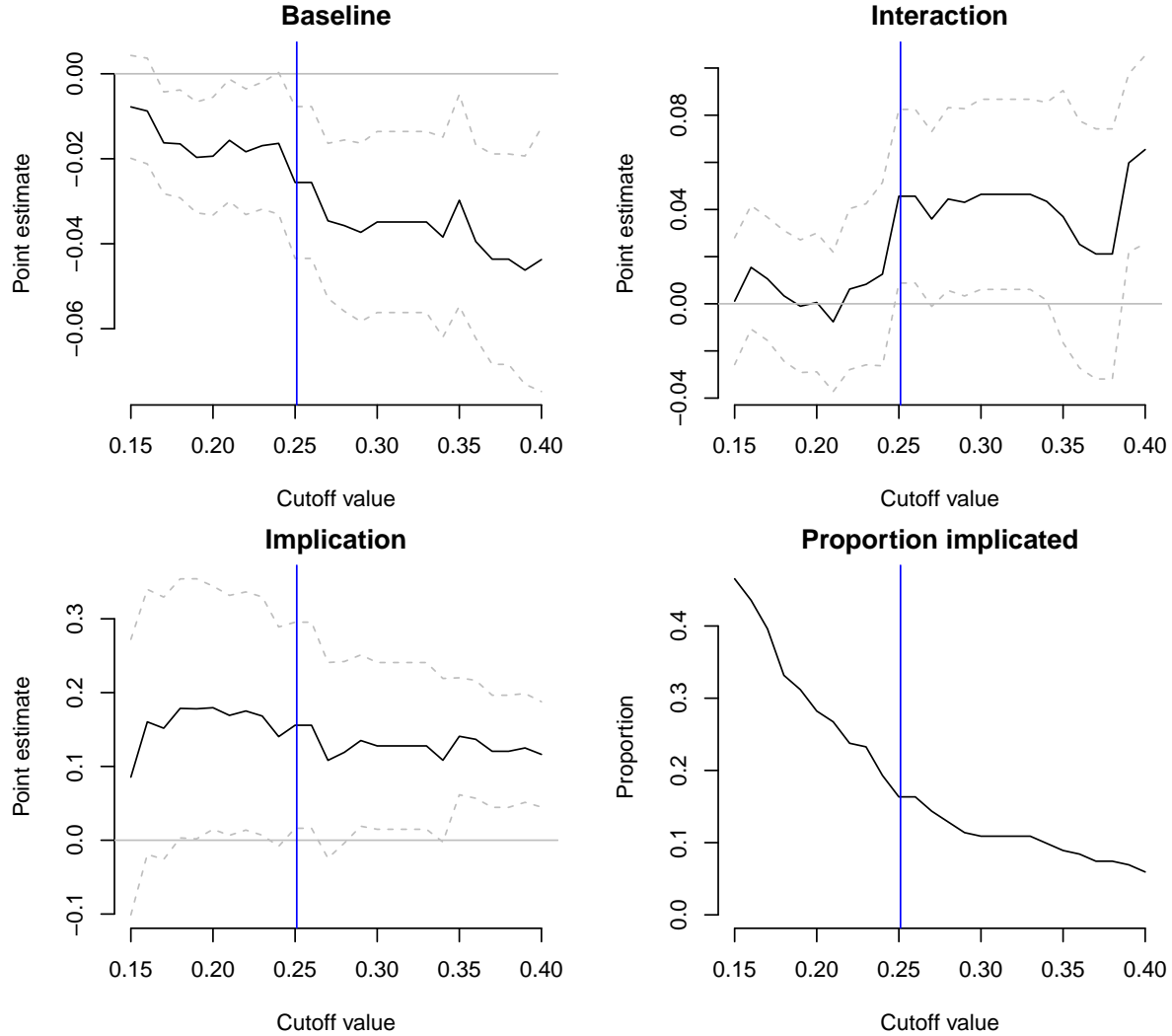
MP	Total stories	Expenses stories	Score
Margaret Moran	158	140	0.83
David Chaytor	109	93	0.78
Andrew MacKay	111	89	0.74
Julie Kirkbride	198	147	0.71
Peter Viggers	92	72	0.71
Douglas Hogg	42	36	0.69
Anthony Steen	152	111	0.69
Derek Conway	23	21	0.64
Harry Cohen	48	36	0.62
Sir Alan Haselhurst	37	29	0.62

*Note:* “Total stories” counts the stories returned by a Google News search of the MP’s name and constituency; “Expenses stories” counts the stories returned by a search with these terms plus the word “expenses.” The list includes MPs who did not stand for re-election.

One concern about a media-based measure of implication is that the media may selectively report abuses in a way that relates to local partisan match-ups. For example, partisan media outlets may devote extra attention to misbehavior in Labour-vs-Conservative contests because these were viewed as more consequential for control of government. This sort of partisan bias could lead to subtle biases in the results I present in the next section. By more extensively covering abuses in Lab-Con constituencies, the media may make voters *more* responsive to corruption in these contests, in which case I may be *underestimating* the effect of partisanship on electoral punishment (but *overestimating* the effect of partisanship on MPs’ involvement in the scandal). Or, it could be that by devoting extensive coverage to less serious abuses the media makes voters *less* responsive to corruption in these contests, in which case the biases would go the opposite way. One important point is thus that if the media responds to corruption differently in different constituency types it is likely to make one of my main results stronger and the other weaker. Another important point is that Larcinese and Sircar (2012) find no evidence of partisan coverage of the expenses scandal (e.g. left-leaning papers devoting more coverage to Conservative MPs’ expense abuses.), which suggests that coverage of the expenses scandal may also not have been very responsive to the partisan stakes of particular contests.

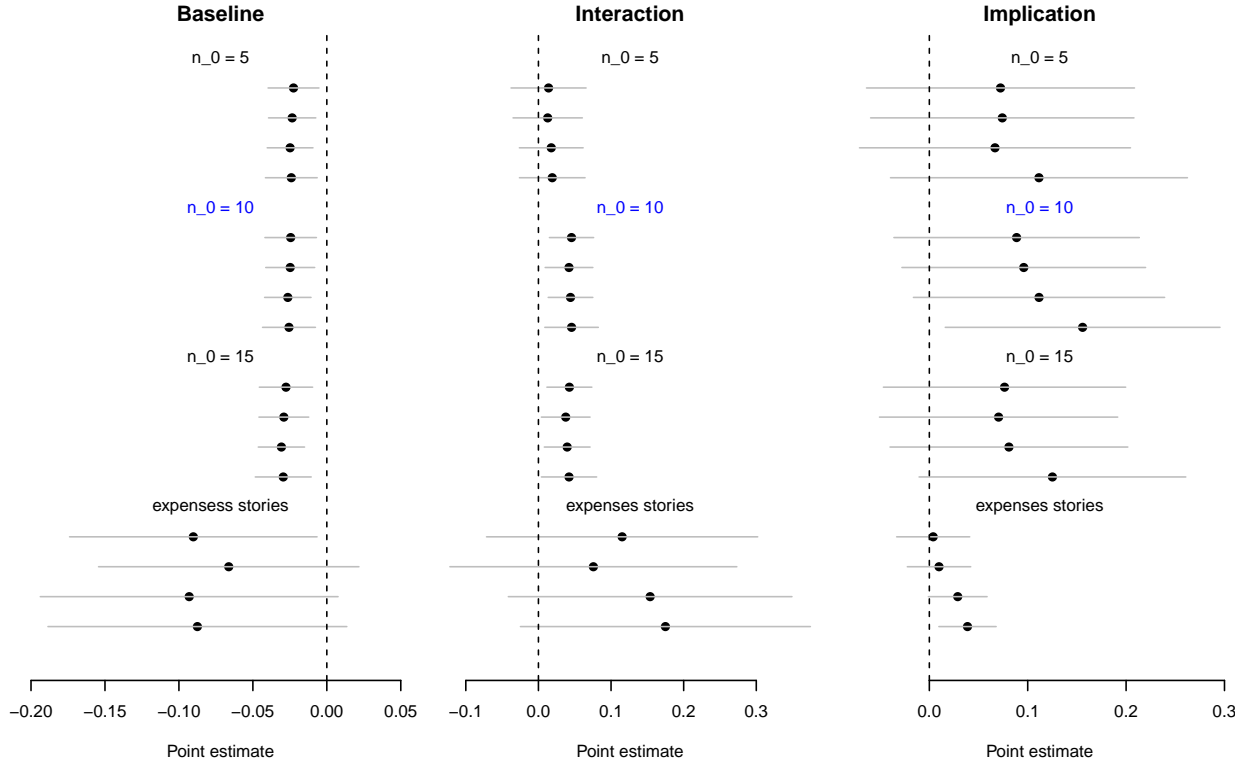
## APPENDIX B: SENSITIVITY ANALYSES

Figure 3: Sensitivity of results to choice of cutoff in implication score



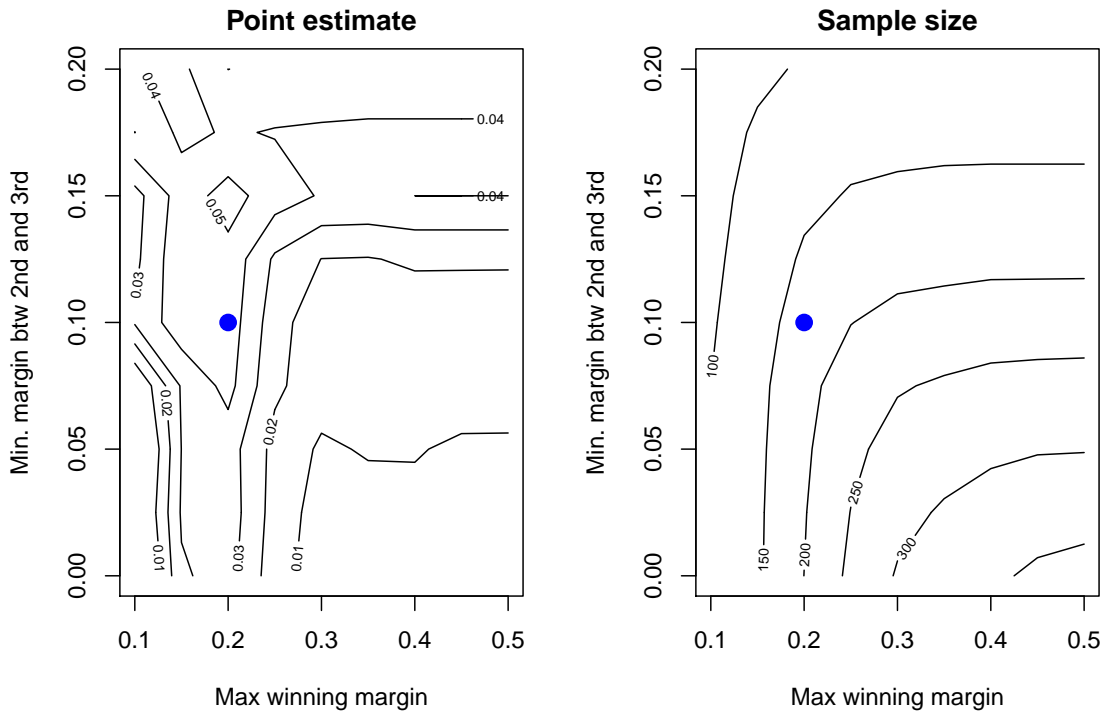
*Note:* This figure shows how the main results in Tables 2, 3 and 5 depend on the cutoff employed to identify implicated MPs from the implication score given in Equation A.1. The first three panels show the point estimate on the main coefficient of interest in Tables 2 (top left), 3 (top right), and 5 (bottom left) depends on the choice of cutoff used to construct the binary implication variable. (In each case, results from the model in column (4) is depicted; the dashed gray lines depict the point-wise 95% confidence interval.) The bottom right panel shows the proportion of MPs in the estimation sample that are marked as “implicated” at a given cutoff value.

Figure 4: Sensitivity of results to measurement of implication



*Note:* The left, center, and right panels of this figure show how the main results in Tables 2, 3 and 5 (respectively) depend on the way in which the implication variable is defined. Each black dot and gray line shows the point estimate and 95% confidence interval corresponding to the main coefficient of interest in one of the columns of a Table reported in the paper under different ways of measuring implication. “Baseline” refers to Table 2; circles indicate the coefficient on “Implicated” in models 1-4 with various values of  $n_0$  and, in the bottom set of coefficients, simply using the number of expenses stories (rescaled to lie between 0 and 1) instead of the proportion of an MPs’ stories devoted to expenses. “Interaction” refers to the coefficient on the interaction term in Table 3. “Implication” refers to the coefficient on “implication” in Table 5. The results reported in the paper (where  $n_0 = 10$ ) are presented for comparison. The similarity of these findings to the main findings suggests that the results do not depend heavily on the value of  $n_0$  in the denominator of the implication measure (or indeed the inclusion of the denominator at all), nor do they depend on creating a binary implication variable.

Figure 5: Sensitivity of Table 3 result to choice of cutoffs defining estimation sample



*Note:* This figure shows how the main result in Table 3 depends on the way in which the estimation sample is defined. The contour plot on the left reports the point estimate on the interaction term in the regression in column (4) of Table 3 (i.e. the interaction between implication and constituency polarization in a regression of incumbent vote share in 2010) under different cutoffs restricting the sample. (The blue dot indicates the cutoffs used in the paper’s main regressions.) Moving left to right on the x-axis, the sample includes less and less competitive constituencies (i.e. those in which the margin of victory was larger); moving top to bottom on the y-axis, the sample includes constituencies in which the “relevant challenger” is less clear (i.e. those in which the margin between the second- and third-place party was smaller in 2005). The left panel shows that the results are sensitive to the choice of cutoffs, as we would expect if voters are strategic. The right panel shows the size of the estimation sample at each pair of cutoffs.