

Political Scandals in Germany (2001–2023): A Systematic Approach to Building a Public Dataset

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Abstract

Political scandals are recurrent across democratic systems, yet research often focuses on isolated, high-profile cases, limiting generalizability and comparability. While some studies examine broader collections of scandals to identify generalizable patterns, they rarely make underlying data publicly available—restricting opportunities for replication, validation, and comparative studies. This article addresses these limitations by introducing an open-access dataset of political scandals and scandalization attempts involving federal-level politicians in Germany between 2001 and 2023. The dataset is based on a content analysis of newspaper coverage from four national-level outlets: *Die Tageszeitung*, *Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*, and *Die Welt*. An initial corpus of 31,274 documents was filtered to include those in which the full names of federal politicians co-occurred with the keywords *Skandal* (scandal) or *Affäre* (affair). Manual coding identified scandal-related content and assigned it to unique cases. Documents were annotated with metadata (e.g., outlet, publication date) and contextual variables (e.g., party affiliation, government/opposition status, gender). The final dataset contains structured data derived from 3,005 articles linked to 199 scandals and scandalization attempts, with over 10 variables per observation capturing publication metadata and political context. The dataset is accessible via an online repository and a web application for filtering and visualizing scandal cases and associated media coverage. The article discusses use cases for the dataset and describes how the approach can be applied across different political and media systems to produce comparable datasets.

Keywords

content analysis; dataset; German media; media coverage; open science; political affair; political scandal

1. Introduction

Political scandals play an important role in everyday political life, often serving as a catalyst for societal change or the end of political careers. Although political scandals are shaped by the specific political system in which they occur and may appear to be unique, short-lived events, their frequent recurrence in different contexts suggests that they have comparable causes, trajectories, and functions that justify systematic, comparative research (Neckel, 2005). Conducting comparative research requires datasets that cover multiple scandal cases. However, creating such datasets is challenging, and open science practices have played only a limited role in scandal research to date, restricting access to high-quality data for scholars.

To address this data availability gap and support future comparative research, I present a publicly accessible dataset of political scandals and scandalization attempts involving federal-level politicians in Germany between 2001 and 2023. The dataset captures 199 distinct cases documented in more than 3,000 news articles published in four national-level newspapers—two daily (*Die Tageszeitung*, *Die Welt*) and two weekly (*Der Spiegel*, *Die Zeit*). Each article was supplemented with political context variables, publication metadata, and a unique case identifier. Researchers can access the data either by downloading them directly or by exploring them interactively through a web application, both available via the Open Science Framework (OSF; <https://osf.io/pg3km>).

This article is structured as follows: First, the state of comparative designs in scandal research is outlined, followed by a discussion of the importance of open science practices and data availability in political scandal research. The methodology used to generate the dataset is then described. In the following section, the dataset is presented, including its variables and the features of the accompanying web application. Potential avenues for future research using the dataset are then outlined, and guidance is offered on how the methodological approach can be applied to generate comparable datasets in other national contexts. Finally, the dataset's limitations are discussed, and the article's key contributions are summarized.

2. Comparative Designs in Scandal Research

Scandal research, also termed scandalology (Haller et al., 2018), has emerged as an interdisciplinary field comprising researchers from numerous academic disciplines, including communication studies, sociology, political science, economics, history, and literary studies. As Baugut (2017) notes, this interdisciplinary interest has led to a highly diverse landscape of theories and assumptions about what constitutes a scandal, how it unfolds, and what functions it serves. Most scholars agree on the key elements of a scandal being (a) the (alleged) violation of a norm, (b) its publication by the (mass)media, and (c) a negative public reaction (Bösch, 2011; Esser & Hartung, 2004; Kepplinger, 2018; Pörksen & Detel, 2014; Thompson, 2000; von Sikorski, 2017). Beyond this shared foundation, however, the literature diverges. Scholars have focused, among other things, on the construction of scandal through the media (Burkhardt, 2025; Kepplinger, 2018; Thompson, 2000), the function of scandal within society (Hondrich, 2002; Kepplinger & Ehmig, 2004; Siri & Kumkar, 2024), or the transformation of the phenomenon in the age of social media (Pörksen & Detel, 2014; Stegbauer, 2018; Zulli, 2021). While the theoretical terrain of scandal research is fragmented, there are dominant approaches within the methodological repertoire for studying scandals across varying contexts.

One prominent way to approach the topic is to examine unique cases. This approach helps to understand the details and implications of a particular case. These studies often analyze features of prominent single cases, such as the plagiarism scandal surrounding former Federal Minister of Defence Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg (Lepsius & Meyer-Kalkus, 2011; Maier et al., 2019) or the Ibiza corruption affair surrounding former Austrian Vice-Chancellor Heinz-Christian Strache (Eder, 2024). A problem with this approach is that focusing on the most influential cases may produce a biased view of the phenomenon by emphasizing patterns and effects that are specific to high-profile cases and not representative of smaller ones (Kumlin & Esaiasson, 2012; Oelrichs, 2016). To overcome this limitation, many researchers study scandals comparatively to identify generalizable patterns. A particularly prominent strand of this literature investigates the effects of political scandals, including the electoral consequences (Bågenholm, 2013; Basinger, 2012; Costas-Pérez et al., 2012; Hamel & Miller, 2019; Pereira & Waterbury, 2019) or its implications for political trust (Close et al., 2023), and survival in office (Geiger & Steinbach, 1996; Rottinghaus, 2023). Other comparative designs focus on patterns in media coverage (Garz & Sörensen, 2019; Hayes, 2025; Kepplinger et al., 2002; Puglisi & Snyder, 2011) or seek to explore differences between national or cultural contexts (Downey & Stanyer, 2013; Herbers, 2023; Kumlin & Esaiasson, 2012). Despite the advantages of comparative designs, much of scandal research continues to rely on single-case analyses (Herbers, 2023; Petersen, 2022, p. 15). As Ludwig et al. (2016, p. 10) note, more systematic, multi-case approaches are therefore needed to overcome this bias and enable more generalizable conclusions.

3. The Need for Open Science Practices in Scandal Research

Although many studies use comparative designs and generate multi-case datasets, several problems arise regarding data availability in comparative scandal research. First, some researchers stated that they used data generated by others (e.g., Hamel & Miller, 2019; Pereira & Waterbury, 2019). However, the underlying data are not publicly available for most studies (Bågenholm, 2013; Basinger, 2012; Downey & Stanyer, 2013; Herbers, 2023; Rottinghaus, 2023). Basinger (2012), for instance, compiled one of the more comprehensive efforts in the field—a database of congressional scandals in the United States covering 237 House members across 19 Congresses since 1973—yet the underlying data are not publicly available. Second, some researchers rely on data produced by think tanks or journalists (Costas-Pérez et al., 2012; Hayes, 2025; Solé-Ollé & Sorribas-Navarro, 2018), making it difficult to assess the methodological rigor of the data. Third, some researchers make their data available but provide insufficient contextual information about the cases, which limits their usability for secondary analysis (Close et al., 2023). Lastly, some research materials are available in formats that are unfit for direct use. For example, Puglisi and Snyder (2011) include their case data only as a table within the article text. Garz and Sörensen (2019) publish their list of 71 German political scandal cases between 2005 and 2014 as a table in a .doc appendix. Kumlin and Esaiasson (2012) similarly publish their dataset—covering scandals occurring during 153 parliamentary elections across 19 Western European countries between 1977 and 2007—in a .doc appendix. Becker (2024) compiles a list of 27 scandal-related resignations of German politicians between 1990 and 2024 as an appendix to a book chapter. Such formats are not machine-readable and must first be converted before the data can be reused. Even though the data are principally available in these cases, they are hard to retrieve, cite, and work with.

These shortcomings are not limited to scandal research. In recent years, broader movements within communication science have promoted the adoption of open science practices to address these and related issues (Dienlin et al., 2021; Haim & Puschmann, 2023; Strippel et al., 2023). Of particular relevance to this

article are contributions focused on data sharing—defined as “the practice of making empirical data from research studies freely available and without qualifications” (Bowman & Spence, 2020, p. 710). Data sharing in communication research presents several challenges. These include ethical concerns, legal restrictions (e.g., copyright), cost–benefit considerations, and the requirement for technical knowledge (Haim & Puschmann, 2023, p. 248). To address these challenges, scholars have developed practical guidance for sharing research data responsibly and effectively (e.g., Bowman & Spence, 2020; Lewis, 2020). Recommended steps include the anonymization of sensitive information, the use of common file formats such as .csv, the publication of datasets in online repositories that assign persistent identifiers (e.g., DOIs), and the careful preparation and documentation of the data to ensure they can be understood and reused by others.

Despite growing awareness of open science principles in communication research—particularly regarding data sharing, transparency, and reproducibility—scandal research has yet to meaningfully adopt them. As outlined above, even in studies using multi-case comparative designs, datasets are rarely shared publicly, or when they are, they are often difficult to access, insufficiently documented, or published in formats that hinder reuse. This limits transparency, replicability, and the potential for cumulative knowledge building within the field. This also applies to the German context. While Garz and Sörensen (2019) and Becker (2024) have generated datasets covering German political scandals, these are either limited in their temporal scope, restricted to specific scandal outcomes such as resignations, or not available in formats suitable for secondary analysis. A comprehensive, openly accessible dataset that covers a longer timespan and provides rich contextual information about individual cases is therefore still lacking. To help close this gap, I present a publicly accessible dataset of scandalization processes involving German federal politicians between 2001 and 2023. The dataset is published under a CC BY 4.0 license and is available via an online repository. This includes a dedicated web application that allows users to explore, filter, and visualize the data interactively. The complete data availability statement, including the repository link, is presented at the end of this article. In the following sections, I provide a detailed account of how I generated and structured the dataset.

4. Methods

The dataset was constructed by systematically extracting information about scandal coverage from newspaper articles—a method widely used in scandal research to identify relevant cases (Downey & Stanyer, 2013; Garz & Sörensen, 2019; Kepplinger, 1996; Newmark et al., 2019; Nyhan, 2017). The construction process involved three main steps—data collection, identification of scandal-related reporting, and assembling the scandal database—each of which is described in detail below and visualized in Figure 1.

4.1. Data Collection

The underlying data were selected to cover seven legislative periods with varying governing coalitions between 1 January 2001 and 31 December 2023. For media selection, only national-level newspapers were considered, aiming to achieve balance in both political orientation and publication frequency. Two weekly and two daily newspapers were included: the left-leaning *Die Tageszeitung* (daily) and *Der Spiegel* (weekly), as well as the conservative *Die Welt* (daily) and liberal *Die Zeit* (weekly). These outlets were chosen due to the availability of e-paper archives that enabled efficient downloading of full issues. In contrast, other national newspapers either lacked comparable archive access or required subscriptions that were not feasible within the scope of this project.

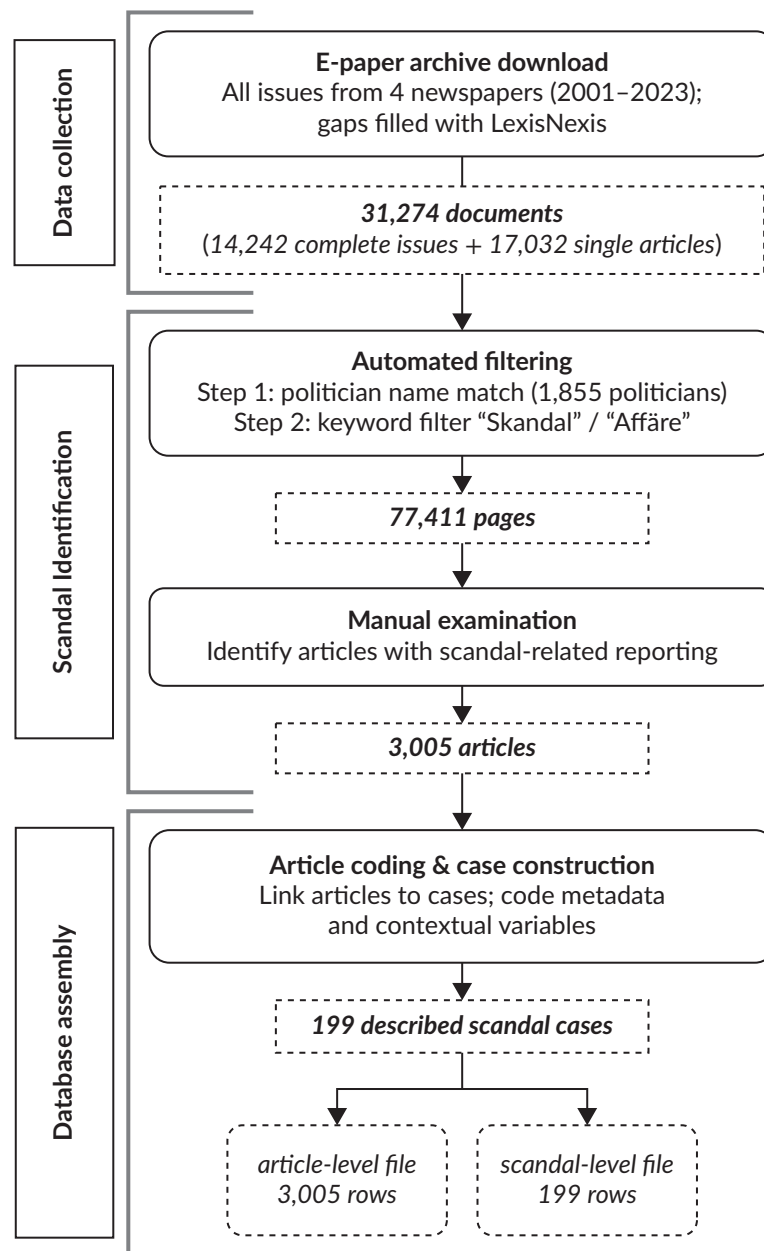


Figure 1. Overview of the database construction process.

All available materials for the study period were downloaded from the e-paper archives of the selected newspapers. During this process, several archival gaps were encountered and addressed using different methods. For *Die Zeit*, complete issues were unavailable from 2001 to July 2012; however, the politics section was accessed via an online reader, and all relevant articles from that period were collected. *Die Tageszeitung* had a gap spanning from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2004. Additionally, 314 missing issues were identified across the dataset: 307 from *Die Welt*, 5 from *Der Spiegel*, and 2 from *Die Tageszeitung*. To fill these gaps, supplementary searches were conducted via LexisNexis, retrieving all articles published on the missing dates in the three outlets that included the German keywords *Skandal* (scandal) or *Affäre* (affair). These terms are frequently used synonymously in the German language (Haller, 2013, pp. 39–40; von Alemann, 2024, p. 102) and have previously been used as search terms in comparable scandal research

(Garz & Sörensen, 2019; Kepplinger, 1996). Through the combination of archive retrieval and supplementary searches, the final corpus comprised 31,274 documents, including 14,242 complete issues and an additional 17,032 single articles.

4.2. Identification of Scandal-Related Reporting

Building on the corpus of 31,274 documents described above, scandal-related reporting was identified through automated filtering followed by manual examination. This dataset focuses exclusively on personalized scandals for two reasons. First, personalization is a key feature of political scandals (Tumber & Waisbord, 2019; Zulli, 2021); even party-level scandals tend to center on individual politicians (Garz & Sörensen, 2019). The CDU/CSU mask scandal, for instance, in which party members profited from Covid-19 procurement contracts, was a party-level affair that nonetheless centered in media reporting on specific individuals such as Niklas Löbel and Georg Nüßlein. Second, restricting the dataset to personalized scandals offers a methodological advantage: The full names of politicians of interest can be used as an initial filter to reduce the volume of material to a manageable size. To this end, a comprehensive list of 1,855 federal-level politicians was compiled, including members of parliament, federal ministers, federal presidents, chancellors, and chancellor candidates. The list of members of parliament was obtained through direct correspondence with the Bundestag administration (personal communication, July 3, 2024). Information on ministers, presidents, and chancellors was gathered from the *Datenhandbuch zur Geschichte des Deutschen Bundestages* (Feldkamp, 2025), and chancellor candidates were identified through targeted web searches based on official party announcements and contemporaneous media coverage. In the initial filtering step, all documents were split by pages, and only those containing the full name of any individual on the list were retained. In a second step, these pages were further filtered to include only those also containing one of the keywords *Skandal* (scandal) or *Affäre* (affair). This process yielded a dataset of 77,411 pages for manual examination. All data processing was conducted using Python (Python Software Foundation, 2023) and the pandas library (The pandas development team, 2022).

These 77,411 pages were then manually examined to determine whether they contained articles with scandal-related reporting. The operationalization of political scandal is a controversially debated topic in scandal research (von Sikorski, 2017). Some researchers argue that an incident qualifies as a scandal only after it has attracted widespread, consistent media attention (Entman, 2012; Kepplinger & Ehlig, 2004). This understanding is reflected in several operationalizations in the field, which define minimum thresholds for articles or news outlets that need to report on an incident (Allern et al., 2012; Galvis et al., 2016; von Sikorski, 2017). On the other hand, different media outlets come to different judgments about what is scandalous (Puglisi & Snyder, 2011; von Sikorski & Kubin, 2021). Furthermore, even when media coverage is widespread, public judgment about what constitutes a scandal remains inherently fragmented. What one segment of the public regards as outrageous, another may consider irrelevant or even legitimate (Hitzler, 1989). For these reasons, the present study adopts a broad, inclusive operationalization. The dataset aims to capture both scandals that received extensive media coverage and incidents that generated only limited media attention and therefore represent unsuccessful or short-lived scandalization attempts. This approach captures the full spectrum of scandalization processes and facilitates a wide range of comparative research. Since this dataset focuses on personalized scandals, only scandals attributed to a specific politician were included—not those concerning a party, government body, or collective actor.

An article was classified as reporting a scandal or scandalization attempt if it either (a) explicitly described an individual's behavior as scandalous or (b) used the term *Affäre* (affair) in reference to that individual's conduct. This operationalization incorporates two of the three elements commonly identified in scandal research: norm violation and media publication. The criterion that an article explicitly describes behavior as scandalous, or uses the term *Affäre*, presupposes that the reporting itself constitutes the act of publication and that the framing implies an (alleged) norm violation. The third element, negative public reaction, was deliberately not used as an inclusion criterion, as it is difficult to operationalize at the article level and would systematically exclude early-stage or failed scandalization attempts, which this dataset is specifically designed to capture. Articles that disputed whether an incident constituted a scandal—for example, by arguing that a given situation is not a scandal because criticism was politically motivated—were not included, nor were articles speculating that an incident might potentially become a scandal. Regarding the term *Affäre* specifically, as it is polysemous in German and can refer to a romantic affair as well as a scandal, articles in which *Affäre* referred to a personal romantic relationship were excluded unless that relationship itself was the subject of scandalization. For example, this would include cases where the relationship gave rise to allegations of moral misconduct, such as abuse of power or extramarital affairs. Retrospective mentions—such as summaries or background coverage of past scandals—were also included, as were incidental references where a scandal was mentioned but was not the main topic of the article, provided they met the definitional criteria. The analysis was restricted to full articles; page elements such as tables of contents and front-page teasers were therefore excluded.

Manual coding was conducted in MAXQDA (VERBI Software, 2025), with support from two trained coders. Coders were instructed to include rather than exclude potential scandals—even at the risk of false positives—as all positively coded articles were rechecked by the author prior to constructing the final dataset. To assess reliability, each coder coded a random subset of 300 articles alongside a reference coding conducted by the author as a pretest. Coder 1 achieved a recall of 0.600 and a precision of 0.321, reflecting a tendency toward over-inclusion. Coder 2 achieved near-perfect agreement with the reference coding, showing a recall of 1.000 and a precision of 0.938. In practice, the coders each coded 12,000 pages, while the remaining 53,411 pages were coded by the author. The low precision of Coder 1 is unlikely to affect the final dataset, as all positively coded articles were rechecked by the author and false positives removed at that stage. The low recall is a more relevant concern: Articles missed by Coder 1 were never flagged for re-check and therefore could not be recovered. However, given that Coder 1 coded approximately 16% of the total material, the likely impact on the overall dataset is limited.

4.3. Assembling the Scandal Database

After all scandal-related articles were identified, they were consolidated into a structured dataset. For each article, the publication date and publishing outlet were recorded. To link multiple articles covering the same event, a unique descriptive identifier was created for each scandalization process. These identifiers followed a consistent format: the involved individual's last name followed by an underscore and a brief case-specific keyword. Where possible, designations commonly found in contemporaneous media coverage were used (e.g., Fischer_Visa for the visa scandal involving Federal Minister for Foreign Affairs Joschka Fischer). When no widely established label existed, a concise, descriptive term was assigned. In some cases, multiple norm violations involving the same individual were grouped into a single case, particularly when media coverage treated the allegations as part of a broader, evolving affair. A prominent example is the Wulff_Loan case,

which began with reports that then Federal President Christian Wulff had received a private loan from a business associate and later expanded to include allegations of influence-peddling, misuse of office, and pressure on the press (Kepplinger, 2018). In these instances, articles often blended multiple accusations into a larger narrative, making it difficult to pinpoint which allegation was being referenced. Such articles were therefore assigned to the relevant umbrella case—the main scandal label used in media coverage that grouped multiple related allegations under a single narrative. By contrast, when media coverage treated allegations as clearly distinct in time or substance, separate identifiers were assigned to each affair. For example, former Federal Minister of Defence Rudolf Scharping faced multiple scandals during his tenure, including a holiday trip to Mallorca with his partner while Bundeswehr troops were deployed in Kosovo, and the acceptance of payments from a private consulting firm. Because these episodes were reported as unrelated controversies, they were coded as separate cases.

All cases were categorized into four types, following a widely adopted typology in the literature (Basinger, 2012; Garz & Sörensen, 2019; Hamel & Miller, 2019; Pereira & Waterbury, 2019). The categories were:

- Financial scandals, involving unlawful personal enrichment (e.g., corruption, tax evasion, illegal gifts).
- Sex scandals, encompassing breaches of social or legal norms regarding sexually appropriate conduct (e.g., sexual harassment or assault, extramarital affairs, or pedophilia).
- Political scandals involve professional misconduct without personal enrichment, including violations of political norms, illegitimate party donations, and failures of duty.
- Other scandals cover norm violations not included in the other categories (e.g., drug use, plagiarism, false information about professional experience).

In addition, a brief description was included for each case to assist users in understanding the specific nature of the case. The start date for each case was determined as the earliest publication date among all articles associated with that case. To generate additional information on the politicians involved, party affiliation was coded using previously collected data on federal-level politicians (see Section 4.2). For cases in which politicians later left or were expelled from their parties, all articles were attributed to their original affiliation. Government or opposition status, as well as political role (e.g., federal minister, chancellor), was assigned based on the individual's position at the time of initial media coverage. Gender was also coded based on first names, supported by contextual cues such as pronouns where necessary.

5. Dataset Description

The final dataset comprises 3,005 articles linked to 199 distinct political scandals and scandalization attempts involving federal-level politicians in Germany between 2001 and 2023. Each article is annotated with article metadata, information about the corresponding case, and contextual details about the involved politician. To support different types of analysis, the dataset is provided in two formats. The article-level file contains all 3,005 entries. The case-level file excludes article-specific details and retains only one row per case (199 rows). All variables in the dataset are listed and described in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of the variables in the dataset.

Variable	Description
Media_Outlet*	Media outlet in which the article was published (either zeit, taz, spiegel, or welt).
Publication_Date*	Date on which the article was published (YYYY-MM-DD).
Case_Identifier	Unique identifier of the case discussed in the article. Can be used to join article-level and case-level data.
Category	Type of scandal (either financial, political, sex, or other).
Case_Description	Brief description of the case, including the name of the involved politician and the transgression committed.
Start_Date	Date of the first article on the specific case in the dataset (YYYY-MM-DD).
Number_of_Articles**	The total number of articles about the case in the dataset.
Last_Name	Last name of the involved politician.
First_Name	First name of the involved politician.
Gender	Gender of the involved politician.
Party	Party of the involved politician at the start of the scandal.
Government_Status	Indicates whether the involved politician is part of the governing party or the opposition.
Political_Role	The involved politician's current office, position, or candidacy.

Notes: * Media_Outlet and Publication_Date are only included in the article-level file; ** Number_of_Articles is only included in the case-level file; for copyright reasons, the full article texts and headlines cannot be made publicly available.

5.1. Description of Scandal Cases and Coverage

The 199 cases are unevenly distributed across time and party affiliation. Figure 2 summarizes the number of unique cases per year and by party affiliation.

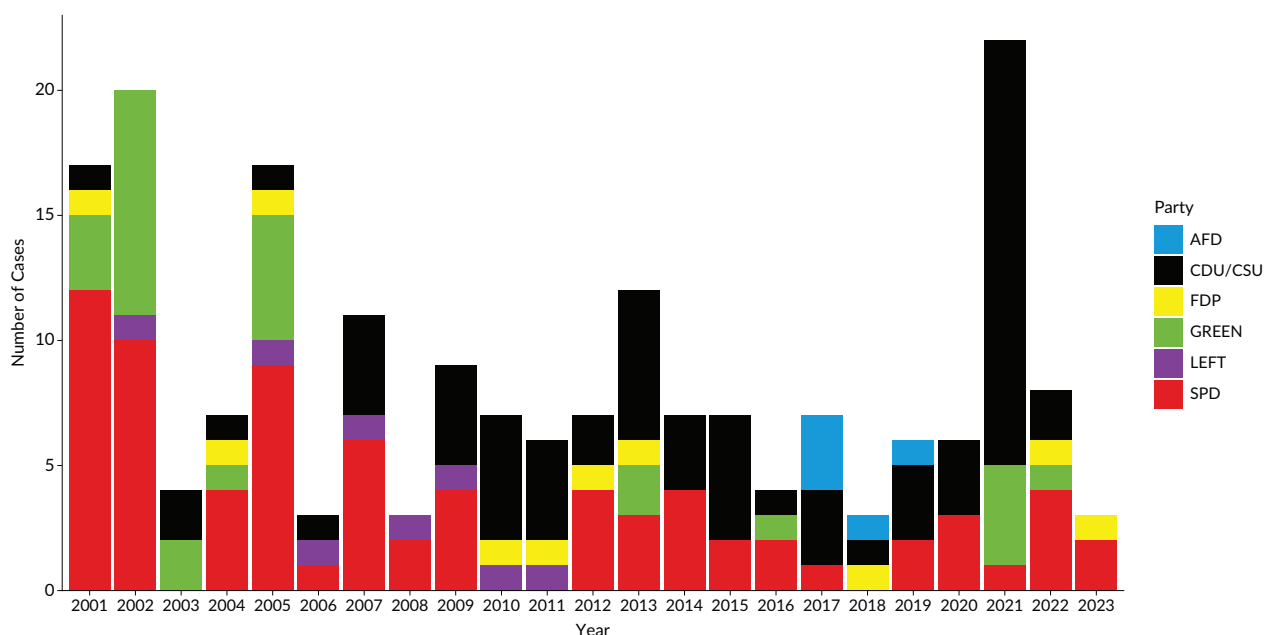


Figure 2. Number of cases per year by party. Notes: Year refers to the date of the first article on a case; cases spanning multiple years are assigned to the first year.

Of the 199 analyzed scandalization processes, 80% involved members of governing parties, while 20% involved members of opposition parties. Among those affiliated with governing parties, 100 individuals held executive office as federal ministers or the chancellor. The majority of cases involved male politicians (77%), whereas female politicians were involved in 23%. The cases were grouped into four categories (see Table 2). Political scandals were the most common, followed by financial and other types of scandals. Sex scandals were the least frequent.

Table 2. Cases by type and by government status.

Type	Government	Opposition	Total
Political	77 (91.7%)	7 (8.3%)	84
Financial	42 (73.7%)	15 (26.3%)	57
Sex	6 (85.7%)	1 (14.3%)	7
Other	35 (68.6%)	16 (31.4%)	51
Total	160 (80.4%)	39 (19.6%)	199 (100%)

The dataset comprises 199 cases documented across 3,005 media articles. The volume of coverage varies widely between cases. Figure 3 shows the number of articles published for each scandal or attempted scandal. While 72 cases are represented by a single article, others received extended coverage, with the most extensively reported scandal appearing in 337 articles (Mdn = 3, $M = 15$). This variation reflects differences in how scandals developed. Cases with little coverage mostly represent short-lived incidents or unsuccessful scandalization attempts that never developed into full-blown scandals because the initial allegation failed to attract sustained media attention. Cases with extensive coverage, by contrast, tend to

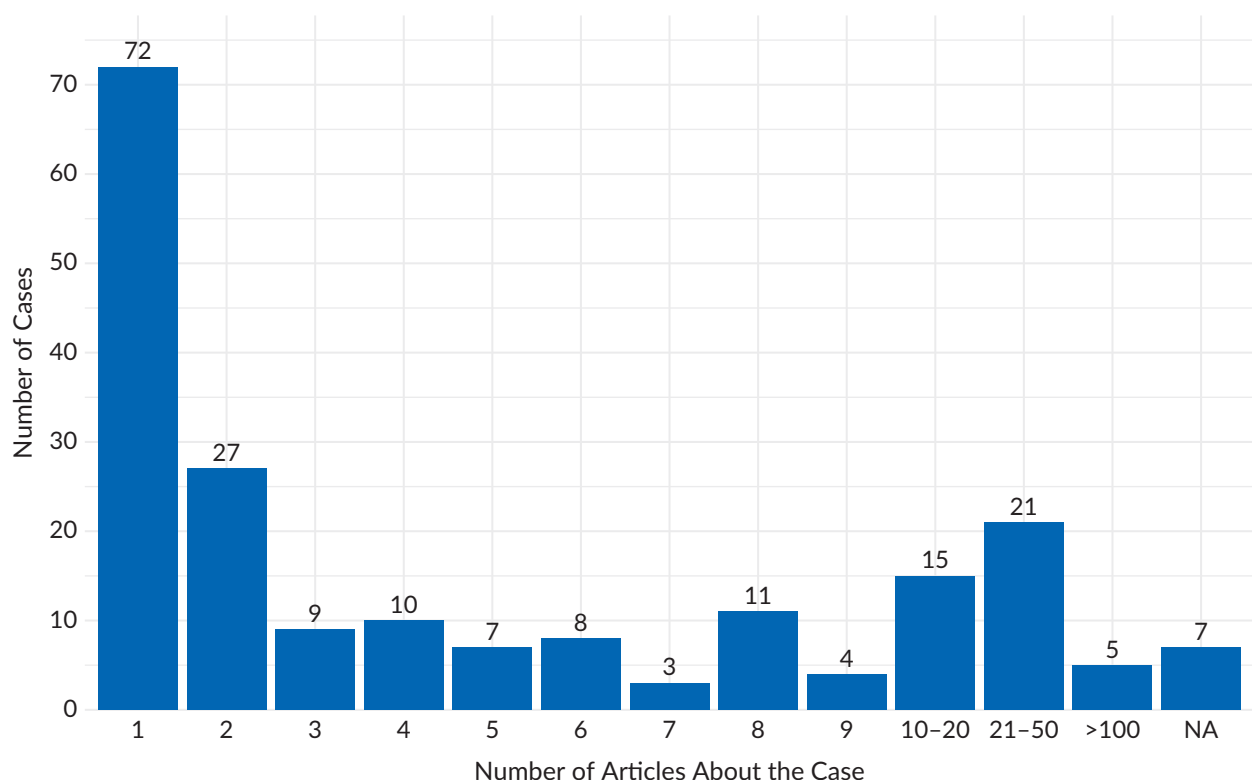


Figure 3. Variation in media attention across cases.

reflect scandals in which the initial allegation was followed by new revelations, political reactions, or prolonged public debate, keeping the case in the news cycle. Coverage also differs by scandal type: Political scandals account for 46% of all articles, followed by financial scandals (29%), other scandals (15%), and sex scandals (10%). In terms of government status, 86% of the coverage relates to scandals involving members of governing parties, while 14% concerns members of opposition parties.

5.2. Description of the Web Application

To facilitate the exploration of the dataset, I developed a publicly accessible web application using the R Shiny framework (Chang et al., 2024). The application is available via OSF (Dvorak, 2026). I based the layout and interface design in part on the Manifesto Project Data Dashboard (Lehmann et al., 2025), which served as a helpful reference during development. The app leverages shinydashboard (Chang & Ribeiro, 2025) for the dashboard layout, dplyr (Wickham et al., 2023) for data manipulation, ggplot2 (Wickham, 2016) for dynamic visualizations, and DT (Xie et al., 2024) for the interactive, searchable table. Users can interactively filter the data and examine the results in two complementary formats. Figure 4 shows a schematic diagram of the application layout. In the left sidebar, users can define their selection using various filters, including date range, political party, category, and others. Based on these criteria, the interface updates (a) a dynamic plot in the top right section of the dashboard, which displays the number of scandal coverage articles over time, grouped by political party, and (b) a table in the bottom right, listing the matching cases along with key details such as case name, case description, and category. The table can be searched and sorted for easier navigation. In the top navigation bar, users can download or share the current selection, consult the FAQ for common questions, or open the Information panel, which provides additional context and citation instructions.

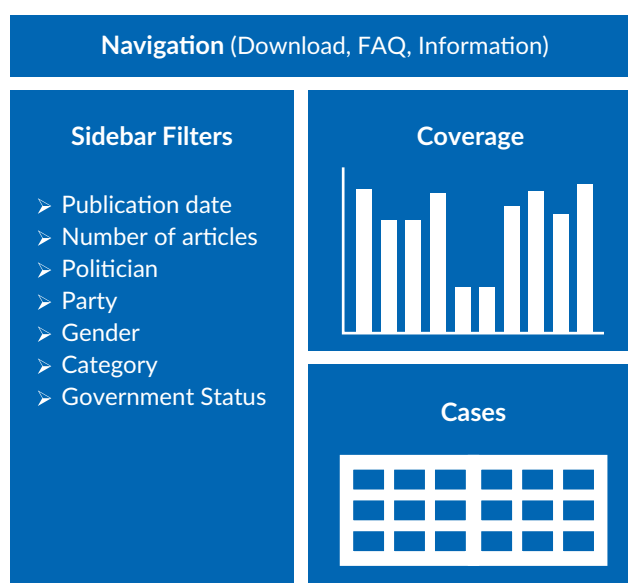


Figure 4. Structure of the web application interface.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

The primary goal of this project was to develop a reliable, transparent, and replicable method for identifying and categorizing political scandals in Germany based on media reporting. In the following discussion, it is

outlined how the dataset can support a wide range of research questions in scandal research, how the approach might be adapted to different political and media systems, and key limitations are highlighted to help guide appropriate interpretation and use of the data.

6.1. Opportunities for Future Research

A persistent challenge in scandal research is the complexity and ever-changing nature of the subject. Many studies deal with changes in the concept of scandal in relation to changes in the media system (Pörksen & Detel, 2014; Siri & Kumkar, 2024; Zulli, 2021). At the same time, the boundaries of what qualifies as a scandal have themselves shifted over time. Behaviors that triggered public outrage decades ago may now be treated as politically irrelevant and vice versa. Scandalization, in this sense, reflects changing societal norms as much as political transgressions. The dataset presented here illustrates these definitional tensions. The 199 cases vary substantially in their topics, intensity of coverage, duration, and political context. Even though the typology used to classify the cases (Basinger, 2012) is broadly and loosely defined, many cases still fall outside this framework, with a substantial proportion classified as “other,” reflecting the diversity and fluidity of what is labeled scandalous in political discourse. This heterogeneity also stems from how cases are identified in the dataset. Rather than imposing a theoretical definition of scandal, the dataset identifies cases using scandal-related labels and language in political discourse. This low-threshold approach yields a large number of cases and enables the analysis of both established scandals and attempts at scandalization. It thus opens up avenues for future research on the construction of scandal labels, the success or failure of scandalization processes across political contexts, and the further development of typologies of political scandal.

The literature on political scandals consistently points to a rise in their frequency over time (Kumlin & Esaiasson, 2012; Umbricht & Esser, 2016; von Sikorski, 2017). Explanations typically point to a range of interacting factors, including the increased visibility of political leaders, changing journalistic norms, and shifts in political culture (Thompson, 2000), as well as the establishment of social media, which has altered the dynamics of political scandal (Burkhardt, 2024; Pörksen & Detel, 2014). Despite general agreement on the growing prevalence of political scandals, there is relatively little systematic empirical evidence examining how this increase has unfolded over time or how salient the different contributing factors are. The dataset presented here can serve as a starting point for addressing this gap, as it provides a broad empirical basis for scandal cases spanning 23 years. It enables researchers to examine how both the volume and the substantive character of scandals change, and to explore which types of alleged misconduct gain traction in different periods. In addition to long-term trends, the data may also shed light on shorter-term temporal patterns in the timing of scandal coverage. There is some evidence—and frequent speculation—that scandals are strategically surfaced or amplified during politically sensitive moments, such as election campaigns, coalition negotiations, or leadership contests (Garz & Sörensen, 2019; Mitchell, 2014). The dataset’s temporal granularity allows examination of whether scandals cluster around key political events and whether certain types of scandals are more likely to emerge during these windows.

As varied as political scandals themselves are, so too are their consequences. Some cases result in resignations, legal proceedings, or institutional reforms, while others appear to leave the accused unaffected. Understanding the consequences of political scandal has been a central topic in scandal research (Praino & Stockemer, 2022; von Sikorski, 2018). Existing studies have examined how scandals influence electoral consequences (Bågenholm, 2013; Basinger, 2012; Hamel & Miller, 2019; Leininger & Rudolph, 2025; Pereira

& Waterbury, 2019), candidate evaluation (Bhatti et al., 2013; von Sikorski, 2020; Vonnahme, 2014), political system support (De Micheli & Taylor, 2026; Maier, 2011), political trust (Close et al., 2023; Larner et al., 2025), and survival in office (Rottinghaus, 2023), to just name a few. While some of these studies utilize experimental designs, the starting point for most of the work in this field is the identification of suitable scandal cases so that, subsequently, effects on the desired outcome variable can be measured. The dataset presented in this article offers a structured, comprehensive list of cases that can serve as a foundation for follow-up studies. Researchers interested in the consequences of scandals may use this case list to conduct quantitative analyses based on additional coding (e.g., whether a resignation occurred) or to select specific cases for in-depth qualitative research.

6.2. *International Adaptability*

The approach is adaptable to other national contexts, but several aspects must be considered. First, prior work suggests that what is perceived as scandalous varies across national and cultural settings (Eko, 2019; Esser & Hartung, 2004; Oates, 2019). As a result, behavior that constitutes a scandal in one context may not receive the same level of attention in another. Second, scandals may be labeled and framed using different linguistic and rhetorical expressions that serve similar discursive functions. For example, in Spanish-speaking contexts, the term *caso* (case) is often used instead of scandal to denote norm violations. Researchers seeking to apply this method in other contexts should therefore carefully account for both context-specific understandings of scandal and the vocabulary used in the respective media environment to describe such violations.

Adaptations may also depend on differences between media systems (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Scandal research frequently emphasizes that characteristics of the media environment, such as journalists' motivations to report on scandals (Mancini, 2019), competing news events (Nyhan, 2017), or fragmentation and polarization (von Sikorski & Kubin, 2021), are important factors shaping processes of scandalization. The selection and framing of scandals may therefore follow system-specific patterns that influence what is publicly perceived as a scandal. To account for these differences, researchers should carefully select news outlets that provide the broadest possible coverage of scandal reporting within the respective media system. Beyond these media-system logics, scholars seeking to adapt the proposed approach must also consider technical constraints on data accessibility. In particular, researchers should ensure that complete issues or volumes of the selected outlets are available, for example through digital archives or third-party service providers.

When applying the approach across different political contexts, researchers should also consider the extent to which political scandals—as forms of public critique of political actors—are possible. Early scandal research assumed that political scandals are confined mainly to liberal democracies (Markovits & Silverstein, 1988). However, more recent studies have examined scandal dynamics in political systems that are generally considered less free, including China (Lee, 2018) and Russia (Oates, 2019). This research suggests that while scandals may unfold differently in such contexts than in liberal democracies, they are nevertheless possible. Researchers seeking to apply the proposed approach to non-democratic contexts should therefore engage with existing scholarship on scandals in these systems to understand the peculiarities of scandal under these political conditions.

6.3. Limitations

Despite the dataset's potential to support research on political scandals, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, not all scandals from the study period may have been captured. Multiple factors contribute to potential undercoverage. Missing texts may have resulted from archival gaps, and although additional sources were consulted to compensate, some cases may still have been overlooked. The media sample was limited to four newspapers, representing another constraint. Other major journalistic sources such as television and online platforms also report on political scandals but were excluded due to practical constraints, including licensing costs and limited archive access. Additionally, much of the scandalization that occurs nowadays takes place outside of traditional journalism, particularly on social media. While some incidents are widely debated on social media, they do not develop into scandals recognized by the print media. The filtering procedure may also have contributed to undercoverage. The co-occurrence of politicians' full names and keywords was relied upon, which may have led to the exclusion of articles describing scandalous behavior without using these terms. A further structural limitation concerns the restriction to personalized scandals. Organization- or party-level scandals that never coalesce around specific named individuals will be systematically absent from the dataset. Finally, the low recall of one coder may have introduced some degree of underinclusion in the approximately 16% of pages they coded.

Second, the article-based information may be incomplete or imprecise. The start date of each scandal or scandalization attempt was determined by the first article about the case. However, some cases may not have received immediate coverage, and the earliest article in the dataset may have been retrospective. Some articles may also have been missed due to archival gaps or filtering limitations. As a result, the recorded start date may not always reflect the actual onset of the case, especially when coverage is limited. Person-specific variables such as party affiliation were coded based on individuals' positions at the time of the first article. These attributes were not adjusted to reflect subsequent changes (e.g., party expulsions). Verifying these details for all 199 cases was beyond the scope of the project, though future researchers could enhance the dataset's accuracy by refining these elements. Such enhancements could, for example, involve manually verifying start dates against additional archive sources, including additional news sources to capture broader or earlier and later coverage, or updating person-specific variables such as party affiliation and government status at multiple time points to reflect changes over the course of a scandal. Researchers wishing to contribute such improvements are encouraged to contact the author directly. Updated versions could then be published as new releases on the OSF project page, ensuring full version transparency and traceability of changes.

6.4. Conclusion

Overall, the approach presented here offers a transparent framework for constructing media-based datasets on political scandals. While the limitations outlined above define a clear agenda for future work, they do not diminish the dataset's potential to support a wide range of research questions—from long-term trends in scandal frequency to the electoral and institutional consequences of individual cases. By making both the data and the underlying method openly available, this study directly addresses a persistent shortcoming in scandal research—where publicly accessible, reusable data for comparative research have largely been absent. Researchers working in different national contexts are encouraged to adopt and refine this approach to build comparable datasets and enable meaningful cross-national comparisons in scandal research.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

Data Availability

The dataset generated in this study is publicly available via the Open Science Framework (OSF) in machine-readable CSV format licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) at <https://osf.io/pg3km>. An interactive web application for filtering, exploring, and visualizing the dataset is also available via OSF and can be accessed directly from the project page.

LLMs Disclosure

I used Grammarly for grammar and style improvements. I used ChatGPT (GPT-4o) to create case descriptions for individual scandal cases. I used Claude (claude-sonnet-4-5) to generate and refactor code for the R Shiny application and data processing tasks. All AI outputs were thoroughly checked, modified, and refined by the author.

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