

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Through the Looking Glass: Controversy, Scandal and Political Careers

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents who always pushed me to answer the difficult questions and to take the time to do so properly.

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Abstract

This work measures whether MPs are held individually accountable for their actions through a novel analysis of the 1997 and 2010 UK general elections. Previous research suggests that MPs' behaviour has little effect on their careers; however, developments in the media's aggressive reporting style, the rise of personality politics and decline in traditional voting patterns indicate that this is an opportune time to examine the effect of political controversies (including scandals) on MPs' careers. This analysis focuses on three crucial stages that form a chain of accountability: (1) exposure: the media publicises the controversy and a perception is formed; (2) internal sanction: an MP retires before an election; (3) electoral sanction: voters punish MPs at the polls. Data on MP-specific controversies between the 1992 and 1997 and the 2005 and 2010 elections was sourced from *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Telegraph* and their respective Sunday editions. This work also contains an original analysis of the 2009–2010 MP expenses scandal that utilises British Election Study panel survey data to examine how information on MP malfeasance affects voters' perceptions of MPs. The findings indicate that political controversy is linked to whether an MP retires, with those MPs from the governing party driving the result in both the 1997 and 2010 elections. Overall, voters do not hold MPs responsible for their actions at the polls. Analysis of the expenses scandal supports these general findings: constituent perceptions of their MPs' expenses behaviour respond to public information, but do not translate into election results. Internal sanction is shown to be the most powerful form of political accountability in the chain. While identifying any individual MP accountability is novel, the overall results are in line with traditional analyses of the strength of party politics, and indicate the importance of electoral system design for accountability.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

“All persons possessing any portion of power ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust” (Edmund Burke)

1.1 A period of crisis

Since its birth in Ancient Greece, the core of any democratic society has been a pact that links politicians and the citizenry together in pursuit of a better society. Citizens delegate representative power to politicians so that they will implement policies to benefit and protect their constituents. The relationship between representative and citizen is, at best, symbiotic and interdependent and democracy only flourishes when both work in tandem with mutually agreed aims.

The past few years have been tumultuous in the United Kingdom (UK). UK debt passed one trillion in December 2011 for the first time, despite an austerity drive, and is now in the midst of a double dip recession (Cowie, *The Daily Telegraph*, 28 April, 2012). These economic woes along with a flagging school system, a controversy-riddled NHS and the growing divide between the upper and lower classes has conspired to leave the public in a confused, anxious and angry state. This would be an opportune moment for the Government to seize the opportunity to shine. To take charge in such times and to offer cogent and reasoned solutions to problems that face us is a basic purpose of the system. However, there is instead a general feeling that elected government representatives are not properly working to combat these issues and that “Government badly needs to hear just how much plain fear there is around such [issues] at present” (Williams, *New Statesman*, 9 June, 2011).

The central tenet of the relationship between the elected and the electorate, that the elected have a duty to care, is very publicly in doubt. In the absence of firm and confident solutions, there is a vacuum of leadership and low faith in the abilities of government. Adding to this lacklustre performance, from the point of view of the citizenry, power has been entrusted to a group of leaders

who appear more and more to operate free from concerns for transparency and decent measures of accountability. The result has been the loss of trust in leaders and government.

Britons are struggling in a *trust vortex* – believing that they can no longer rely on the people who are meant to be accountable, open and reliable to tell the truth. YouGov data reveals an aggregate decline in trust across all leading media outlets. In 2003, 82 % of over 2,000 adults trusted ITV news journalists and 81 % trusted BBC news journalists to tell the truth a “great deal” or a “fair amount”. By July 2011 those figures had slipped 35 and 23 percentage points respectively. Similarly, trust levels of journalists at upmarket newspapers like *The Times* and *The Daily Telegraph* as well as mid-market papers (e.g. *The Daily Mail*) fell 30 and 20 points over the eight year period. It appears that no news agency has been spared.

In a *post-trust* era where cynicism rules the day, politicians do not fare much better. Senior Liberal Democrats were trusted by 36 % of those surveyed to tell the truth in 2003 and slipped to 18 % by July 2011. High-ranking Labour ministers broke even over the eight-year period, but only 25 % of respondents felt that they could trust them to tell the truth in the first place. Leading Conservative politicians moved up two percentage points, but started with a low 20 % trust mark (YouGov, 2011). Polling from Ipsos MORI confirms these findings and extends the analysis back to the 1980s. Across almost a 30-year period, politicians were generally trusted an average 14 % to tell the truth (Ipsos MORI, 2011). This indicates a long-term issue that is only now being given its due attention.

There has been public concern surrounding significant declines in standards of public life for decades. A number of studies inspired by the public’s reaction to the dreary ethical performances of John Major’s Tories definitively demonstrated a distrusting public. Though not all of the Conservative Members of Parliament’s (MPs) actions were illegal, “they created a climate in which politicians were seen as out for their own interests and they sapped the public confidence in public

servants” (Pattie and Johnston, 2001: 192). This sentiment led to investigations into the connection between the actions of political representatives and the health of British civic culture generally. While the role of individual politician’s behaviour has been treated as secondary to the significance of larger and more widespread issues (i.e. the economy) it has been found that the British electorate of the late 1990s was a “...relatively cynical electorate, not convinced that politicians always have the public interest uppermost in their minds” (Pattie and Johnston, 2001: 217). That said, the final conclusion was that this had not produced a fully-fledged rejection of the Westminster system; voters were critical, but not necessarily alienated. As it were, the health of British democracy had taken a hit, but was still not in serious crisis (Norris, 1999).

The rise of trust as a theme, and specifically trust in government, as a “hot-topic” in the press and intellectual debate indicates that it is an increasingly significant issue (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2012). It is important not to conflate two key components of effective government: truth and success. The truth does not yield a 100 % success rate. Instead, it signals an effort to be honest and forthright – two qualities that work in concert with competency in any great politician. For instance, the impact of failing for a politician who had been open about the risks associated with a particular decision are bound to be less dramatic than for the politician who took a decision in a cloud of secrecy. One only has to look at the fallout from Prime Minister (PM) Tony Blair’s decision to invade Iraq alongside the United States (US) or PM Gordon Brown’s role in the resolution to release the Lockerbie bomber to see the results demonstrated. While these are decisions that many, if not the majority, would have objected to they are remembered as instances of betrayal more than anything else (Shipman, *The Daily Mail*, 29 November 2009; Pryce-Jones, *The National Review*, 21 May 2012). All of us understand that humans make mistakes: it is part of our fabric. By contrast, dishonesty is always unacceptable. Since the electorate imbues political officials with the power to represent them and

their best interests in parliament they are, by logical extension, owed at the very least an honest portrayal of what actually goes on in government.

Clandestine actions both inside and outside the walls of parliament have created this air of distrust and contempt that pervades the British political scene today. However, paradoxically, the disenchanted public has not totally given up and they continue to be vocal with the aim of holding government to task even though they fear that they will not succeed. While Britons have seen a succession of inquiries and investigations that have led to very little change they still demand them.

1.2 What matters to the public?

The media has come to play an unrivalled role in the reporting and mitigation of political events. The fallout from the *News of the World* phone-tapping scandal is only the most recent indication of this relationship, one that is far too close for comfort. This issue has also been an integral component to the evidence presented at the Leveson Inquiry¹ and recommendations to address it will, no doubt, be central to Lord Leveson's findings upon completion. The intimate connection between the media and the political apparatus raises all sorts of issues revolving around the accuracy of reporting and bias in journalism. The impact of journalism on the public's attitudes towards politicians and how politicians react and defend themselves against unwanted slurs and revelations can be seen in the resulting decline of transparency, which in turn leads to a reduction in trust.

Despite efforts to 'spin' stories or avoid investigations, politicians have been unable to curb or control relentless reporting and intrusions on all issues whether relating to a politician's personal or professional life. While there may be a pronounced partisan slant to the coverage, the reality is that

¹ The Leveson Inquiry was set up to examine the culture, practices and ethics of the media as well as the relationship of the press with the public, politicians and the police in light of the phone-hacking scandal. For more information see <http://www.levesoninquiry.org.uk/>.

events are bound to appear on the pages of the broadsheets as well as the less critical mid-market papers and salacious story-seeking low-level papers.

In this sea of reporting lies a key to understanding the electorate's perception of politicians and political institutions more generally. For most citizens, the press is the only regular connection they have to politics. It follows that they are left to rely on journalists to inform them about key governmental decisions, a prospect made unsettling by the complexity of the relationship between politicians and the media. This is buttressed by oft criticised less-than-ideal levels of local constituency work that MPs engage in as compared to other systems like the US where Congressmen are famed for their personal connection to their constituents and focus on ensuring that they deliver good policies for those they represent.²

The issues that are brought to the public's attention on a daily basis by the media are wide-ranging. There are reports of the daily goings on in parliament and there are editorials and news articles detailing the benefits and drawbacks of specific policies. We find opinions on the performance of the politicians themselves, such as are they doing a good job and what are the approval ratings? Furthermore, there are always articles that expose the private behaviour of politicians, letting us know who is having an affair, for instance.

Through journalists' choices of what to report and what to ignore they are, *de facto*, telling us what we should care about. While some of this reporting is extremely valuable for its role in keeping the public up to date and informed, much of it is focused on issues and behaviour that one might not think *should* matter to the public. However, because it is given clout by the press it is imprinted onto our psyches and we find ourselves gossiping about our representatives as if they were entertainment celebrities. Even if Britons do not fundamentally trust journalists to tell the truth they are still

² This does not mean that MPs have no personal relationship with their constituency, but that it is arguably not as strong as in other countries.

affected by the content of the news as being constantly surrounded by it leads to absorption, whether voluntary or not.

Let us not forget the fact that scandals and secrets are fun to read about. They can be a diversionary joy when the rest of the news is on crashing markets and various military entanglements. And scandals are powerful. So powerful that Matthew Parris writes in his 1995 book on parliamentary scandals, "...to interview a man who has been felled or crippled by a scandal is like talking, long after the event, to the survivor of a road accident or natural disaster. He becomes gripped by a kind of post-traumatic horror, very intense, sometimes staring at the desk as though he were alone in the room, or talking to a psychiatrist" (xix). This example illuminates the significance of scandals in British society; it would prove very difficult to reduce a grown man to a "post-traumatic horror" if he had not been affected greatly. As Parris points out, it was often not the nature of the misdeed that hurt him, but the press that had beaten him down. Parris felt that, "[t]he British press (and arguably the British readers whose appetites we serve) [emerges] too often as more than bystander, more than reporter; more, even than investigator: we emerge as aggressor. [And] the problem is not diminishing" (1995: xviii).

All of this indicates that the news encourages the public to care about a broad range of issues vis-à-vis politicians. They are briefed on matters relating to his or her professional duties and policy stances that are, no doubt, very important. They are also given insight into the private lives of politicians which, when the issues rise to the level of breaches of trust or affect performance, deserve coverage. There are also revelations of personal stories that are mere gossip and are therefore less important but are nevertheless given attention. As the strongest connection between Westminster and the electorate, the media is deeply involved in this *trust vortex* as both the informer and as a betrayer itself. This point is encapsulated in the following quote from Chris Grayling, the current Employment

Minister. He commented to *The Times* in reference to Dr Liam Fox's "inappropriate" relationship with his friend and adviser, Adam Werrity,

I've known Liam for many years, I've known Liam and his wife, and they've always struck me as being a very happily married couple. The reality is that gossip is certainly circulating. I thought we had got past the point where we needed to worry about people's private lives. The question is somebody doing an important and capable job (Webster et al., *The Times*, 12 October 2011).

The Fox case demonstrates how important MPs' personal lives have become and, additionally, how often the line is blurred between the professional and the personal. Fox's personal relationship with Werrity turned out to be a significant issue in the episode. In this way an MP's personal life is linked to the persona the media creates for them no matter if it is relevant or not.

1.3 Testing the waters

We have a distrusting and disengaged public, a biased and scandal-seeking media and we have politicians who are perceived to be largely unaccountable and prone to acting inappropriately. The relationship between these three players (the public, the media and the politician) and the ensuing damage to the effectiveness of our representative government is what motivated this research.

A thorough assessment of individual political accountability in Britain provides a way to address the connection between these groups and to add insight into how Britons arrived in their present condition. While many of the objections to the British media and government (especially after the 2009–2010 expenses scandal) are of the type that you would expect to hear levied against undemocratic regimes, Britain is not undemocratic. It follows that there are aspects of the system that can be exploited to test whether or not politicians are held accountable and, if so, in what ways.

As discussed above, the news media present a daily feed of information on the behaviour of individual politicians including information on both their professional and personal behaviour. As

avid consumers of news, these stories are likely to affect the public and alter their perception of the politicians in the stories. This could manifest itself as disapproval of a particular policy stance of an MP or his or her performance as well as a judgement on the private behaviour of the politician. For the purposes of this study, these types of actions all fall into an umbrella category: political controversy. Though their individual natures are distinct in that some involve financial or sexual misconduct (which would be more readily deemed a scandal) and others involve major failings in managing professional duties, they share similar qualities. They all attracted negative news attention and were presented with a view toward calling into question the actions of the MP involved. These controversies offer a medium through which we can understand and measure accountability in today's British political scene.

This research will tackle accountability by examining the steps that form a chain that ends in electoral sanction where voters use elections as a mechanism to hold representatives to account. Before the actual election, there are three important steps in the chain. First there is the exposure step where the media makes the information about a politician's behaviour publicly available. Second, the information is processed by the public and by other politicians and they form a coherent perception of the event. Finally, before the electoral sanction step, an MP may retire before an election. This step, which is referred to as internal sanction throughout this work, does not preclude the possibility of an MP retiring out of personal choice. Instead, it offers that MP retirements might also be carried out at the behest of the party management because if an MP runs again then they face potential electoral sanction at the polls. This research addresses each of these steps and as the most recent and flagrant example of the effect of perceptions, in Chapter Seven, I will concentrate on the 2009–2010 parliamentary expenses scandal alone.³

³ I conducted this research on the 2009-2010 expenses scandal with two co-authors, Dr Nick Vivyan of Durham University and Dr Markus Wagner of the University of Vienna. I am extremely grateful to both for their work.

1.4 A preview of what is to come

The media provide us with coverage of political controversies. There is always something new to read about and although each story does not connote the existence of a controversy there are plenty to fill our pages. Tracking political controversies is the first step in this accountability study. I searched the major UK broadsheets for all controversies that occurred between the 1992 and 1997 elections as well as for those between the 2005 and 2010 elections.⁴ By finding the stories in the broadsheets one can pinpoint the moment of exposure, when the event reaches the electorate and becomes a public issue. In most cases, the expectation is that politicians are aware of the story before it hits the papers, but its publication is still the official marker that the controversy has gone live and that public perception of the event will be developed.

The perceptions step in the accountability chain is tested in two different ways. It is measured directly using British Election Study (BES) data in Chapter Seven, which is a thorough examination of the expenses scandal. It is also dealt with via the two main forms of sanction, internal and electoral, addressed in this research. There are two important features of British politics and the Westminster system that deserve consideration at this juncture. The first is the tightly managed apparatus of each political party. Party officials micromanage MPs' behaviour. Starting with the candidate selection process, candidates are cherry-picked to run for office and then regulated. The selection process itself has been criticised for the unbalanced level of power given to local associations and a "misguided" approach to selection that awards "category rather than ability" (Irvine, *The Daily Telegraph*, 21 August 2009). Once in office, party whips act as enforcers pushing MPs to attend votes and, once in attendance, to vote in the best interest of the party (Kam, 2009: 26). A system of carrots and sticks incentivises MPs to stay in line as the promise of ministerial office or a

⁴ Political controversies are tracked in *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Observer* for the 1992-1997 general election period and *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* for the 2005-2010 election period. Chapter Three offers a detailed explanation of this tracking process.

seat on the frontbench awaits those who make themselves indispensable to the party. “Party leaders use a variety of strategies...screening out the uncongenial, distributing office perks to the loyal and disciplining the recalcitrant” (Kam, 2009: 21) to ensure that things run smoothly and that the right people get promoted. Rebellion is frowned upon.

The second feature is that it is generally thought that there is little room for individual MPs to carve out personal reputations and to serve in parliament as agents of their constituents as opposed to, generally, agents of the party. An MP must strike a delicate balance between his or her two masters, constituents and the party, but it is generally thought that promoting party unity will win out (Kam, 2009). Further, the British voter only gets one vote and must use it to elect their MP *and* the government. It is therefore likely, though not definitive, that a voter is more concerned with ensuring the party they want in office gets elected.

It follows that the first test of accountability is internal sanction. This study measures the perception of political controversy by the political parties themselves via analysis of the relationship between controversy and the decision to retire from parliament. While the exact reason that an MP retires can never be known with complete certainty, the acknowledged strength of party control in Britain suggests that this is a relationship worth exploring.

The second accountability test is electoral sanction wherein I measure the effect of political controversy on an MP’s vote share. Although investigating this relationship is generally dismissed as fruitless due to other factors taking prominence in voting decisions, there are factors that suggest that MPs’ personal behaviour could be taken into account.⁵ By using the difference in an MP’s vote share between two elections as a dependent variable, I will be able to identify the effect of the controversy, if any. In this way we can see if the electorate’s voting behaviour reflects an opinion on an MP’s

⁵ These factors will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, but include the rise of third parties, the decline in class voting and growth in valence issue voting generally.

actions via sanctioning them at the polls, or if other factors hold greater significance in explaining an MP's vote. This finding will then shed light on the public perception of the MP's behaviour.

Finally, to test the strength of the entire accountability chain I turn to the 2009–2010 parliamentary expenses scandal. We use BES panel survey data and a unique measure of MP involvement in the scandal to examine whether voter perception of their MP responds to public information. We then measure the impact of the scandal on vote choice.

1.5 Findings at a glance

Political controversies sourced from the major broadsheets were found to be significant predictors of an MP's decision to retire from parliament. This link is present in both the 1997 election and the 2010 election. Additionally, political controversy is significant as an explanatory variable for MPs from the party in power (i.e. Conservatives in 1997 and Labour in 2010) or when MPs from all parties are considered in aggregate.⁶ While there are many potential contributing factors to a retirement decision, the data suggests a strong relationship between political controversy and retirement. This could indicate the existence of internal sanctioning within parties though the data cannot rule out other factors as pushing the retirement result.

As for the impact of political controversy on an MP's vote share, the results are far less substantive. Overall, political controversy is not a significant variable in explaining the difference in an MP's vote share between the 1992 and 1997 or 2005 and 2010 elections. This demonstrates that the electorate does not use elections as an accountability mechanism to punish MPs for the types of behaviours analysed in this study and that other issues were of greater importance.

⁶ There is an individual statistically significant result for the opposition in my analysis of the 2010 general election (Conservative MPs). In this instance, there are only four cases of political controversy driving the result and it is therefore difficult to make a general claim about the impact of political controversy on opposition MPs' decision to retire. This will be discussed in Chapter Six when I analyse the 2010 election. However, based on the low number of cases, I argue throughout this thesis that the effect of political controversy on the decision to retire holds for the party in power and MPs considered in aggregate, not the opposition.

In the direct test of public perceptions of MP behaviour, the investigation of the expenses scandal reveals that voter perceptions of their MP's behaviour is linked to whether or not the MP was actually involved in the expenses scandal. That said, almost half of voters did not know or try to guess if their MP was involved in the scandal. For those who did know, we found that when a voter perceived their MP to have overclaimed they were five per cent less likely to vote for the incumbent. Though this effect is arguably marginal, and translated to estimated one and a half percentage point losses on election day in aggregate assessments (Curtice et al., 2010; Eggers and Fischer, 2011; Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming), the result indicates a burgeoning perceptions-sanction link. However, the perceptions-sanction link is not as strong as one would expect considering the outrage over the scandal. This therefore indicates that voters do not use elections as an accountability mechanism for MP misbehaviour, a likely consequence of institutional design.

The media is demonstrated to be a clear gateway for public consumption of news on MP controversies and scandals. However, there is a significant disconnection between absorbing the information, processing it and then sanctioning a public official. It follows that the public does not use elections as an accountability mechanism to punish MPs for what they perceive as bad behaviour. The risk of having a political party in power that is not their preference is a greater evil than being represented by an MP who they believe has acted improperly. This reality correlates to the institutional features of the Westminster system, which fosters and maintains an environment of party dominant politics at the expense of individual MP accountability.

1.6 Chapter plan

This thesis is structured in the following manner. I first review the relevant literature from a range of distinct fields. I then present my methodology for collecting data on the controversies themselves and my case selection. I present descriptive statistics relating to the dependent variables used to measure internal and electoral sanctions, the decision to retire and variation in an MP's vote share, and a range of novel independent variables used for analysis. In the results sections, I first analyse the 1997 election and then the 2010 election. I then turn to an examination of the 2009–2010 expenses scandal as a unique case study before concluding and suggesting areas for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature

2.1 Where do we begin?

Political controversy is important. It affects people and organisations. It is of focal interest to media outlets that spend extreme amounts of time, effort and money in pursuit of salacious stories, which they count on to sell copies, gain readers and thrive. It has the potential to raise and answer questions concerning whether or not elections are used to hold political officials accountable for their actions or if they have become mere ritualistic endeavours in the UK. Will the electorate continually vote along partisan lines no matter the type of politician up for election? Do controversies actually erode the electorate's faith in politicians and political institutions?

The variety of controversies addressed in this work has not been considered as a package together before. However, scandal, a subset of controversy, has been given a fair share of attention. Scandal plays a part in scholarly debate over the role of information in political choices, perceptions and partisan identification. Literature on blame management strategy is linked to the field of scandal and takes up the critical question for politicians: can the effect of scandal be effectively mitigated? Or, contrastingly, could it be worsened by a politician's approach to dealing with the fallout from the event?

All of the points discussed above begin to define an emerging and expanding field of literature that draws from other distinct fields within political science and political psychology. The research questions in this work do not naturally materialise from a single scholarly conversation that is already taking place. Instead, they draw from many separate knowledge bases. At this juncture, contributions from four distinct subject matters have been integral to the formulation of these research questions and the resulting reflections on the topic: namely the media, public

support/approval of government, political accountability, and the role of information and its relationship to perceptions of facts, partisan identification and political judgements.

2.2 Media

A citizen's greatest resource for gathering information about the world is mass media. This is the case whether they are interested in politics or sports, entertainment, finance or science. Media outlets now collectively wield such tremendous power that they are in the greatest position to direct public opinion. This power is a relatively new phenomenon with such a significant responsibility that it can be (and is) either carefully considered or casually abused. The freedom to express opinions, biased ones, measured ones or even factually erroneous ones at that, is an integral and guarded component of modern-day democracy. In the most positive sense it promotes discussions and debates that lead to solutions and to an actively engaged society. It serves the purpose of making a better-informed public who become conversant in issues that affect their lives and the lives of people in far-flung locations across the world. However, the power to inform is one that can be manipulated with potentially very little consequence. Information and disinformation come at us so rapidly now that it becomes obsolete sometimes only moments after its publication or utterance. Furthermore, with so many outlets, pundits and opinion makers, it is often incredibly difficult to recognise objective information from that which was written subjectively or with a slant, even in some of the "best" newspapers, since the majority claim to be unbiased in their coverage.

This research is not specifically concerned with the media per se, but more with its relationship with and impact on controversy and politics. Simply put, how does the media impact the public's perception of politicians? In the face of the 20th century practice of disseminating social facts as news and the dramatic rise in the number of scandal-based news stories (Thompson, 2000: 52), how have politicians been affected? Lastly, how dramatic has this effect been?

The ethos of journalism has changed and, accordingly, public perception of politicians and political institutions more generally have followed suit (Bowler and Karp, 2004). The climate of all-encompassing suspicion and distrust that the media has created with such alacrity has lowered people's expectations of public officials. As a result, the media has become a self-made official player in the resignation literature (Mortimore, 1995). The media plays a key role in the orchestration of political controversy through its aggressive commentary and less-than-objective reflections that are passed off as objective news.

Controversies that are more akin to scandal are big news. Media outlets have succeeded in making it news such that now it is a top priority to get the best coverage of the event. Media created the frenzy and the interest and they must now compete for the stories. Quick and expansive coverage, as was the case of *The Daily Telegraph's* coverage of the 2009–2010 parliamentary expenses affair and *The Guardian's* reporting of the 1994 'Cash-for-Questions' scandal, can vastly improve the journalistic reputation of a particular media outlet. Once the public comes to associate a specific newspaper with reliable 'breaking' news on a scandal, it creates a larger and, hopefully, loyal readership base. One need only look to the example of *The Washington Post* during the Watergate scandal to see that the coverage of Bernstein and Woodward enhanced the reputation, readership and status of that paper for decades.

Since then, political scandal coverage has widened further, encompassing an expanded journalistic license directed to aligning their audience and enlarging it with their perspective. They focus on scandal to increase their audience. Certain media organisations have become consumed with pressing their point of view (and they call it news, not opinion). This means that even the news section of newspapers may include thoughts that should be expressed in the opinion section of the paper and it appears without disclaimer or disclosure. So, while the media has the important ability to play the part of the watchdog and bring important events to the public's attention, and is entrusted

with this important role, its reporting may be clouded by the personal opinion of the author of the piece. Puglisi and Snyder (2008: 3) aptly write, “[o]f course, in practice the media might or might not serve as faithful watchdogs ... according to the ‘agenda-setting’ theory of mass media, editors, and journalists enjoy considerable freedom in deciding what is newsworthy and what is not, and these choices affect the perception of citizens about which issues are relevant and to what extent.” Unfortunately, citizens do not get to sift through and determine which facts are true facts and which are opinion-facts.

These tense relationships between the public, the media and their objects of scrutiny connect the players in a power struggle to control the public narrative. This phenomenon is explored in work by Francke (1995) and Balkin (1999) who conclude that the media has become sensationalist and that, accordingly, the public has become sceptical of the information they receive. While there are those who argue that voter knowledge regarding candidates is low in the UK in comparison to other countries (Pattie and Johnston, 2004), heavy media focus on politicians and their actions indicates that voter knowledge cannot be that low, albeit potentially biased or warped by partisan journalism, for if voter knowledge was truly that low, then news outlets would not be covering politics so avidly.

The pressure of consistent press scrutiny creates a legitimate conflict of interest for holders of public office. They may be conflicted “between the needs for the government to be both shrewd, competent decision-makers (crucial to good government) and accountable” (Moncrieffe, 1998: 391). For public office holders, the accountability check was traditionally fulfilled via the election function. However, since the media became a virtual boss and self-proclaimed judge of contemporary politics, one can say that any news day can be transformed into election day (Doig and Wilson, 1995: 25; Mortimore, 1995: 32). The belief that public officials pursue personal gratification against an official backdrop of respectability is corroborated by public opinion polls reflecting increasing concern with a downturn in standards in public life (YouGov, 2011) and correlated redefinitions of acceptable

standards of behaviour for public representatives. The atmosphere in which a moment can change the course of a career is not conducive to staying focused on always doing the best thing versus the thing that may look the best.

Politicians have added tools for survival to their arsenals. Even beyond a politician's quest to tailor his or her behaviour to meet, and surpass, the public perception of satisfactory behaviour is a politician's need to engage in what is most commonly referred to as image management. This refers directly to a politician's manipulation of the media, and political communication more generally, to protect his or her image throughout one's tenure, especially in difficult times, such as during a scandal. Often it goes beyond protecting an image to creating one that the politician can rely on to support him or her for a full political life. "[P]oliticians, as candidates and as leaders, generate symbolic constructions made from interactions of messages that circulate through news media, interpersonal conversations [and] political discourse..." (Hacker et al., 2003: 1). These creations are what the media cover and relay back to the electorate with, in many cases, their own personal slant on the message. It follows that these messages are being manipulated (Nimmo, 1995) and are, therefore, constantly in flux. For this reason, political communication strategies, dynamic creatures that require constant attention and tweaking, are deployed by politicians to battle the media over their public persona. These strategies are integral to maintaining a good reputation, which can be so easily destroyed (Pattie and Johnston, 2001).

There have been a number of studies about the press' relationship with issues of political corruption and government accountability, within which, as one would hope and expect, it is argued that the more media is active, the more accountable the government. In a theoretical model, Besley and Prat (2005: 4) demonstrate that media pluralism reduces the chances that a government might control the news and that if government controls the media, political outcomes are affected. These

effects are manifest either as a moral hazard or adverse selection problem.⁷ Brunetti and Weder's work (2003: 1820) highlights the relationship between higher levels of press freedom and lower government corruption across a large sample of countries. Finally, Besley and Burgess's (2002) paper based on the Indian case highlights the role of high newspaper circulation and electoral accountability in increasing government responsiveness to food shortage and natural disaster relief. Though the topics of these papers are varied, they each point to the significant relationship between the media and government. This relationship is often one in which the media acts as a legitimate watchdog on the government. In this way, newspaper articles have become an excellent source for tracking and evaluating events in the political arena.

2.3 Support for political actors and institutions

Naturally, in this climate of conflict where a politician has both a need for capturing attention and a healthy fear of scrutiny, a politician must add media savvy to his or her list of requirements for success. The wide reach of the media and, more specifically, electronic media's collapsing of temporal and spatial restrictions on the consumption of news create a flood of reports of scandals of all varieties. The continual flow of scandal-related news balloons into a virtual cloud of negative data. It logically follows that the impact of all this influence is to erode public opinion towards government (Dalton, 2002). More specifically, it affects voter's levels of trust, which is rooted upon evidence that politicians possess character traits and abilities that can be depended upon (Keele, 2007: 243).

⁷ There is a full discussion of accountability issues relating to moral hazard and adverse selection in the following sections.

2.4 Specific and diffuse support

What scholarly consideration of this connection exists evolved from Easton's (1965, 1975) assessment of political support, which deliberates on the distinction between specific and diffuse support. Diffuse support constitutes a reservoir of institutional goodwill and is assumed to be distinct from specific support that refers to how the public views incumbents and their performance (Easton, 1975; Bowler and Karp, 2004). The connection between these two forms of support was a fleeting hot topic in the 1970s (see Miller/Citrin 1974 debate), but then it was largely left untouched until the late 1990s when media focus on scandal (Chanley et al., 2001; Orren, 1997) and crime (Chanley et al., 2001) became tools to decipher levels of government trust. Bowler and Karp (2004: 271) suggest that scandals involving legislators have a negative influence on constituent attitudes towards institutions and the political process in both the US and the UK. This finding casts doubt on the favoured chestnut (in the US) that citizens may hold Congress in low regard, but inexplicably love their Congressmen (Parker and Davidson, 1979). Further, and in a more hopeful view of our citizenry, it contests the assumption that citizen evaluations of government are unrelated to their views on incumbent behaviour. Generally, however, these findings are summarised by Keele's (2007: 242) assertion that trust is a reflection of government performance.

There is a prolific body of work focusing specifically on the impact of political scandal on the reputations of individual politicians and government leaders. In the British case, opinion poll data shows an alarming fall in public confidence in British political institutions as a result of press coverage and an overarching belief that MPs make money by using their office improperly (Mortimore, 1995: 31–33). Survey studies on occupations with high levels of honesty and trustworthiness register MPs “at or near the bottom of the league, competing with estate agents and journalists” (Kempfner, 13 May 1995: 7; see also YouGov, 2011). Since John Major's time as PM the public has been, rightfully so, disenchanted with MPs' behaviour and clamouring for accountable

government (Smith, 1995; Doig, 1995). The recent uproar over MPs' expenses adds further fodder to this claim.

Recent investigations into the 2009–2010 expenses scandal have found, overall, that the scandal did not have as pervasive an electoral impact as one might have thought, with vote share losses due to implication in the scandal estimated at around one and a half percentage points (Curtice et al., 2010; Eggers and Fischer, 2011; Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming).⁸ In a study directly relevant to this research, Farrell, McAllister and Studlar (1998) examined the impact of 'sleaze' on the performance of Conservative MPs in the 1997 election.⁹ Their study shows that estimated vote loss in the UK is similar to US aggregate studies where incumbents suffered, on average, between a six and 11 per cent loss between 1968 and 1978 and a 9.3 per cent loss in the years 1982–1990 (Peters and Welch, 1980; Welch and Hibbing, 1997). In contrast to the American case, however, UK scandals are taken by the public as much more of a national issue as opposed to being candidate related. Scandals ended up affecting the Conservative party as a whole: "voters still cast their ballots on the basis of party rather than candidate characteristics, the Conservatives as a whole suffered for the misdemeanours of their MPs more than individual perpetrators" (Farrell et al., 1998: 92).

Scandal was not the most significant factor in a voter's decision. Pressing national issues such as the economy and education were paramount in motivating voter defections from the Conservatives (Farrell, et al., 1998: 90). Nine per cent of Conservative seats that were lost (of a total 178) were in constituencies where there had been a scandal allegation against the sitting MP. This number seems quite high, but when Farrell and his colleagues (1998: 85) calculated the predicted vote share based on constituency characteristics and compared it with MPs' actual vote share, the net electoral effect of sleaze was much reduced. This is not to say that the effect of sleaze allegations was not a factor

⁸ Chapter Seven deals explicitly with the expenses scandal and its relationship to vote choice and voter perceptions.

⁹ This study focuses solely on scandals relating to money and sex. The authors identify 24 constituencies where the sitting Conservative MP was the subject of a scandal allegation.

worth examination, but it was found that “only four ... losses ... can be attributed to the direct aggregate effects of corruption charges against Conservative candidates in 1997” (Farrell et al., 1998: 91). Corruption and sleaze affected the national results more than the vote share for individual MPs who had been directly involved in sleaze scandals. If we believe that a scandal erodes faith in government, in our leaders and in our political parties, then it is puzzling that it would not have defeated more candidates.

Drilling down further into the data and the results sheds light. At first, the high re-election rate of scandalised politicians does seem counterintuitive. Why would the public want a tainted politician back in office? Further, why would voters express such outrage over a politician’s behaviour (Dimock and Jacobson, 1995) and vote them back into office, albeit with a reduced vote share? With all of the scandals that have plagued politics and the inundation of the public by media coverage of wrongdoing by politicians, misbehaviour is expected. The public has redefined their expectations to accept that the temptation to engage in inappropriate behaviour, whether personally or relating to their office, is too great and they must, in turn, base their decisions less on character (Jones and Hudson, 1996: 229). Put in simple terms, the public is happier to retain the evil they know, fearing to trade for a worse evil they don’t. It must be noted that US studies show that ‘moral’ charges of corruption are the most damaging to incumbents (Welch and Hibbing, 1997: 236) and Farrell et al. (1998) find that financial and sexual scandals result in relatively equal, yet minor, electoral damage to candidates. However, in the current climate, Funk’s (1996) finding that competence qualities are most important in candidate evaluations is salient. I therefore argue that demonstrating high levels of competence have become a politician’s best defence for maintaining support through a scandal-ridden period.

Nevertheless, simply keeping competent is not a sure-fire route to career survival. Even when re-elected, political scientists continue to demonstrate that scandals deteriorate the public’s regard for

individual politicians and that they have marked electoral consequences for offenders. Bowler and Karp (2004) extend this black halo and show that this negative effect does not stop with individual politicians, but it colours the general perception of political institutions. Considering the prominence of party politics in the UK, this will foretell a continuing distrustful climate for politicians. The umbrella message, that there is a general lack of trust in government, remains solid.

There are a few more studies worth considering. A recent piece of research exploring the relationship between social capital and political accountability in Italy reveals that electoral punishment of political misbehaviour is higher in electoral districts with voters who display heightened levels of social capital (Nannicini et al., 2010). Their indicator of political misbehaviour has two parts. First, they look at prosecutors' requests for criminal investigation and, second, the rate of absenteeism in electronic votes by members of parliament. Additionally, they measure social capital by average per capita blood donations (Nannicini et al., 2010: 1–2). The authors find that “voters endowed with higher social capital are more willing to punish a corrupt incumbent ... because they implicitly cooperate to vote according to aggregate ... welfare criteria” (Nannicini et al., 2010: 3).

In another study, Chang et al.'s (2010) analysis of legislative terms in Italy from 1948–1994, a politician's re-election chances decrease by the same degree as seen in Peters and Welch (1980) when they have been investigated for a serious crime. These findings are promising for the potential impact of political scandal on vote share in the UK though it remains important to consider the difference between scandal and corruption charges for their relative impact on elections.¹⁰ It seems the door is open to further explore the impact of political controversy on vote choice in Britain.

¹⁰ For additional studies on the impact of corruption on elections in the US case see Dimock and Johnson (1995), Groseclose and Krehbiel (1992) and cross-country studies by Anderson and Tverdova (2003), Chang and Chu (2007) and Manzetti and Carole (2007) should also be considered.

2.5 Accountability and institutional context: room for the personal vote?

The overwhelming strength of party politics in the UK appears to dominate the treatment of politicians by the public. This is not to say that members of the electorate do not absorb negative information about the party that they support and its competition. If this were the case, there would never be any significant changes in the British political landscape, which we know does happen, albeit only every 13+ years or so. In fact, they are aware and make decisions based on the content of their accumulated information. However, research does show that UK voters are less likely to base their decisions on a reaction to their individual representative and they are traditionally more likely to vote along party lines.

Why is this? The UK electoral system is comparable to that of the US in that it is built into the design of Single Member Districts (SMD) under the first-past-the-post (FPTP) system that there is a direct link between an individual representative and a geographic area, which he or she represents in government. Where things get complicated for individual political accountability is that the effect of the electoral system is conditional upon the regime type (Carey and Shugart, 1992). The FPTP electoral system in SMDs leads to a strong personal vote in presidential systems like the US, but so far there has been little evidence of it in parliamentary systems with SMDs because the electoral campaign is fought as a national campaign (Cox, 1987). As a consequence of the fact that UK voters cast a single vote at each general election and party loyalty is so important to maintain parliamentary confidence, MP candidates in the UK are less incentivised to cultivate a personal vote with their constituents (Carey and Shugart, 1995).

The personal vote and the role of centralised party systems on representatives' incentives to cultivate a personal vote have been studied previously. For the US scene, political parties are weaker than in the UK, and individual politicians are left enough room to tailor their personal image and policies to directly focus on the needs and wants of their constituencies. As long as Congressmen do

not work against the party organisation and its presidential candidate (though, admittedly, some do) they are left alone, for the most part, to go about their business and serve their electorate (Cain et al., 1987: 207). In the US, representatives have a system of formal independence. They can alter the political agenda, propose their own bills and have the space to express their viewpoint to better characterise the desires of their constituency. In addition, because the party line on a particular issue is not of as much importance as in party-centred systems like the UK, US representatives are in a better position to engage in legislative ‘logrolling’, trading votes on bills with other Congressmen in order to accomplish what they and their constituents need (Shepsle and Weingast, 1981). As Mayhew argues, “if a group of planners sat down and tried to design a pair of American national assemblies with the goal of serving members’ electoral needs ... they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists” (1974: 81–82).

In contrast, MPs in Britain are far more limited in their options. Where, in the US, voters can separate their congressional and presidential choices, MPs in the UK are inextricably linked to the leader of their party. The UK electorate is well aware of this link and correspondingly pays most of their attention to the PM candidates because he or she is, after all, the one who will be setting the agenda.¹¹ It follows that, according to Cain et al. (1987: 215), “if a group of planners sat down and tried to design an institution that magnified the dependence of legislative members on their national parties, they would be hard pressed to improve on what exists in Britain”. Individual legislators have little to no hope of advancing their own agenda without the assistance of fellow, and powerful, MPs. The Executive has grown stronger and stronger over the past few decades especially with Blair’s premiership marred by his ‘sofa cabinet’ approach to Cabinet government. Additionally, it is rare for a Private Member’s Bill to go through, with almost all legislation originating in committees that are closely supervised by the government. For all these reasons, and more, MPs could be considered

¹¹ There is a deeper discussion of valence issue voting models of electoral choice below.

pawns of the party machinery. Given this PM and party priority landscape, is there room for personal accountability in British politics?

There are some important facts to be considered when analysing the potential for a personal connection between an MP and the constituency. First, the direct electoral association between constituents and individual MPs is thought to be one of the great strengths of the FPTP system. It is a focal piece of the debate over electoral reform in the UK, with FPTP supporters continually citing it as carrying paramount significance for the health of modern democracy in Britain. Despite this emphasis, the actual relationship between constituents and their MPs has been hard to identify. Throughout the years, political scientists have filled the pages of their work with evidence of the dominance of party politics in the UK with little support for the arguments that politicians use to defend the system. The issue comes down to the fact that with a single vote choice a voter is going to look at his or her decision as one between competing parties and not necessarily competing candidates (Mitchell, 2000).

So what is the answer? Do MPs build a personal connection with their constituents and, if so, are they held personally accountable for their actions? In perhaps the largest study of the personal vote to date, Cain et al. (1987) explore the depths of constituency work in both the US and UK. They find that Congressmen have a less personal style connection vis-à-vis their constituency work in that they run, essentially, small bureaucracies that are fully staffed and operated by these employees. In contrast, MPs' constituency offices are likened to quaint operations wherein the MP is present in his or her office and takes a central role in the management of constituency issues (Cain et al., 1987: 214). This approach to representative work should result in significant ties to the community for MPs. It falls under the purview of activities that MPs can partake in which will increase the strength of the personal connection between voters and their representatives such as taking casework on

behalf of constituents, holding frequent surgeries, local campaigning and appearances, and raising member interests in the House of Commons (HOC).

Surprisingly, despite MPs participation in these one-to-one and personal activities, the electoral payoffs for US Congressmen are still much stronger than in Britain. This finding is attributable to a lack of variability in the UK system. Constituency effects have a much smaller chance of affecting the general stability of the party dominated system. “Party and executive evaluation effects dominate the British vote; much less variance is associated with support for individual incumbents. Hence, the relationships are weaker to begin with, and intercorrelation among variables makes the effects correspondingly less stable.” (Cain et al., 1987: 178). This result indicates that party affiliation affects an individual MP’s re-election chances far more than an individual MP’s reputation.

A consequence of this finding is the notion that there is little room for individual accountability in British politics. However, while the impact of constituency work has been thoroughly examined and found incapable of surpassing the impact of political parties on voter choices, there has been a decrease in party attachments and class voting (Clarke et al., 2004). Furthermore, third parties have become an important aspect of elections. These are significant shifts in the political landscape as they open the door for an individual incumbent MP to make an impact on his or her constituency in a more personal way and see a vote result from the work. At the same time, it may also open the door for challengers to approach a constituency with some hope of a successful outcome.

In a world where partisan ties and traditional norms of class-based voting are on the decline, a chance (albeit potentially quite small) for voters to use elections to punish or reward their MPs for their specific behaviours has emerged. This phenomenon has been noted in the literature (Kam, 2009) where citizens are shown to make more thorough judgements on their representative, looking beyond

his or her partisan affiliation. Further, research into the effects of campaign spending has demonstrated that it does affect electoral outcomes (Pattie and Johnston, 2004) and constituency service is not to be fully dismissed for its role in influencing results (Herrera and Yawn, 1999), even if the effect is still much smaller in the UK case compared to the US. While MPs have a limited capacity to take personal responsibility and to be judged by their actions, as so many of their actions are party driven, it is not unreasonable to think that voters are paying attention and may, with weakening partisan ties, tailor their vote to reflect their viewpoint on an MP's actions. In addition, rebelliousness among MPs is on the rise (Cowley and Stuart, 2005; Vivyan and Wagner, 2012). Their inclination to speak on issues individually should open the door for politicians to be treated as single entities rather than solely agents of a political party.

An extension of this line of thinking relates to a division in the analysis of British voting behaviour that has put forward models of voter choice that compete with traditional analyses pointing to sociological forces as the definitive factor in the decision-making process. A prominent theory within the political science community is that spatial models are the best way to represent electoral competition. The originators of the spatial model, Harold Hotelling (1929) and Anthony Downs (1957), worked under the central assumption that individuals seek to maximise their utility when they vote for a specific party or candidate in a unidimensional policy space. While it is difficult to disagree with the notion that voters use elections to get the most out of their elected officials, there have been many criticisms of the model. Some naysayers take umbrage with the technical aspects and others reject it outright. Modifications to various aspects of the model are not as relevant to this work as critiques that call into question the fundamental theoretical principles of the Downsian spatial model. Donald Stokes (1963) has been a very outspoken critic of the model, attacking all of its assumptions and its applicability in general. He writes:

The ground over which the parties contest is not a space in the sense that Main Street or a transcontinental railroad is. Treating it as if it were introduces assumptions about the

unidimensionality of the space, the stability of its structure, the existence of ordered dimensions and the common frame of reference of parties and the electorate that are only poorly supported by available evidence from real political systems (Stokes, 1963: 369–370).

The aspect of Stokes's critique of the spatial model that is most pertinent to the issue of institutional context and the relationship between the electorate and their representatives is his analysis of issues where there is consensus. It follows that when there is general public agreement on a specific issue it is not plausible to argue that there is any variation in the policy location of political parties and voters. It is then that decisions are based on other factors (valence issues) where there can be disagreement amongst voters about who they want to represent them. "In this account, large majorities of voters agree about what government should provide – a strong economy...a panoply of well-funded and well-functioning public services...protection from criminals and terrorists...– but they disagree about which party is best able to achieve these consensual policy goals" (Clarke et al., 2009: 5). Voters then turn to partisan identification cues and their perception of the party leadership to form their decisions. "In a world where political stakes are high and uncertainty abounds, partisan attachments to leaders serve as cost-effective heuristic devices or cognitive shortcuts that enable voters to judge the delivery capabilities of rival political parties" (Clarke et al., 2009: 5).

The real strength of the valence issue model of voting is focused on outcomes. Whereas the spatial model assumes delivery of promised policies, the valence model views voters as analysts of past political behaviour, who are alert and aware. They depend on cues from the parties and, most importantly, the party leadership in order to make their decisions. The valence model is particularly apt for scenarios like current-day Britain wherein the two main political parties are increasingly centrist. Voters are left seeking something to help them make their decision when they cannot turn to policy preferences as a guide. It is at this juncture that the electorate pays better attention to the politicians themselves and seeks to determine who is their best option from a set of characteristics outside the realms of traditional spatial issues.

Employing valence issue-driven models of electoral behaviour paints a more complete picture in that they speak to methods by which voters can alleviate uncertainty. The electorate makes retrospective judgements on parties that have been in office in the previous term or recent past. “Valence effects are associated with issues, leadership evaluations and partisan attachments, the latter two being particularly easy heuristics to use for the politically unsophisticated and disengaged” (Clarke et al., 2009: 50). In this way, voters are better equipped to make judgements. It has been argued (Clarke et al., 2009: 52) that when a party has been out of office for a long time the electorate is likely to be driven by spatial issues as they are not familiar with the specific details of the party like their voting record, policies and personas of the leadership.

The fact that spatial and valence issues can coexist is not necessarily a negative in terms of the applicability of the personal vote to the British case. What matters is that valence issue voting exists at all and not just as a result of partisan cues and heuristics, but in terms of party leaders and their personalities, relative likeability and characteristics. Attention to an individual is indicative of an audience seeking a connection. This connection is fundamental to the strength of single member districts even if the party leader is not competing to be the MP for a voter’s particular constituency. All in all, the existence of valence issue voting sets a challenge to unearth the actual strength of the connection between a constituent and his or her representative vis-à-vis attention to past (mis)behaviour and actions. It seems plausible that with the strength of party ties on the decline, an MP could be judged with a greater deal of specific attention.

2.6 Political accountability

The foundational division of interest between a politician advancing his own agenda versus the interests of his constituents is fundamental to understanding political accountability. Focus on this dichotomy grew rapidly from the late 1950s with a series of economic models demonstrating that

office holders generally act out of self-interest (Barro, 1973; Buchanan, 1964; Downs, 1957). These types of investigations led to a branch of political economy literature dedicated to assessing the impact of wages and term limits on performance (see Besley, 2004; Besley and Case, 1995; Diermeier, 2005; Di Tella and Fisman, 2004; Mattozzi and Merlo, 2008). The results of these studies are diverse and their importance to this work is that they are naturally linked to the question of how to attract and keep quality politicians as well as issues of effective incentive structures to address the principal agent relationship between voter and politician.

The relative effectiveness of an election as an accountability mechanism is debatable. Voters face both a moral hazard and adverse selection problem, which would ideally be surmountable via elections. In this particular principal agent situation, there is a well-known argument that elections provide incentives for politicians to deliver to their constituents. While there are key differences in Barro's (1973) and Ferejohn's (1986) seminal works (Barro's (1973) model has term limits and is formulated in a world of perfect information), they offer that constituents can monitor incumbent performance. They can create a threshold for performance and reward politicians who meet it, i.e. deliver the policies that they want. In this way, they face the typical moral hazard problem in that they cannot observe the agent's action, but can only see the outcome, in this case, the policy. Since politicians want to be re-elected in the future, they do not shirk their obligations in the present and, therefore, elections serve as an effective accountability mechanism (Ferejohn, 1986; 13).

Another way in which elections are used is to select between different types. In this world, voters face an adverse selection problem in that they cannot necessarily observe type but have to select between them on election day. Fearon (1999) offers that voters cannot provide incentives *and* select because selection depends on there being some heterogeneity; for selection to be attainable one cannot be indifferent to the candidates. This then complicates the plausibility of selecting purely based on utility delivered because voters must have preferences. Fearon (1999) provides a strong

critique of Barro's (1973) and Ferejohn's (1986) worlds in that their models do not speak to the issue of heterogeneity of candidates, a condition which makes electing based purely on incentivising politicians impossible. It follows that since voters must have preferences for specific politicians, one might not reward a politician who they do not have a preference for even if they deliver the optimal level of utility. In turn, Fearon (1999: 69) argues that "elections may be more about an adverse selection problem – sorting good from bad types that want to mimic them – than about controlling moral hazard". Though his analysis is principally concerned with choosing officials in the hopes of garnering desirable public policy, the finding that elections are a mechanism by which voters make a selection choice as to the type of politician they wish to have represent them is germane to the issue at hand. It follows that a politician's behaviour should invariably be considered alongside his or her ability to affect policy.

As mentioned above, the issue of how to ensure that the best quality politicians make it to higher office has been the subject of much debate. There is a branch of the literature that has tackled this principal-agent problem by employing both theoretical and formal economic models. These models take into account that the world is inhabited by politicians who are best described as either good types who do not rent-seek and bad types who are less concerned with properly doing their job (i.e. delivering good policies and representing their constituents) and are more focused on the relative benefits of holding office such as perks, kickbacks and prestige. Voters are then left to distinguish between the two types with, on most occasions, very little dependable information to base their judgements on.

How is it that high functioning democracies have ended up with such low quality politicians? Quality is a function of competence and honesty; how well politicians are going to do their job and how transparent the process will be vis-à-vis their methods as well as their characters are all related issues. In an ideal world, politicians would respond to constituent needs and also be the kind of

person that a constituent would be pleased to know on a personal level. The reality is very different and begs the question “...how can it be that democracy—a system that allows citizens maximum choice and control over their public decision makers—sometimes generates bad politicians?” (Caselli and Morelli, 2004: 760).

This question motivates Caselli and Morelli’s (2004) work where they paint a picture of the political arena running in a very similar fashion to the private sector marketplace. This perspective creates a supply side problem in that, in a world of heterogeneous candidates, the marketplace will inevitably offer an appealing reward structure to highly qualified candidates (Dewan and Shepsle, 2011). Consequently, “candidates of higher quality are the ones who have more to lose from giving up private life and/or less to gain from holding office. This comparative advantage tends to lower the quality of the pool of candidates from which voters can choose” (Caselli and Morelli, 2004: 760). High quality people turn away from political office since the rewards are too low monetarily and, crucially, too low in terms of social status as the political class is perceived to be made of low quality citizens. This effect is exacerbated by the fact that the reward structure is set endogenously to the office.

Allen and Birch (2012) find that MPs possess a different perspective on ethical behaviour to the rest of the electorate. While Caselli and Morelli (2004) argue that high quality citizens avoid political office, Allen and Birch (2012) posit that those who choose to run for political office are not necessarily any different from the rest of the population, at least in the beginning. The authors find that MPs go through a change when they are the *holders* of public office, not just at the candidate level. “[I]ncumbent MPs were significantly less likely than non-incumbent parliamentary candidates or those they represent to describe as corrupt questionable behaviour involving Members of Parliament...It thus appears that being an MP is a crucial factor in promoting a greater tolerance of

some ethically dubious conduct...” (Allen and Birch, 2012: 109). From their findings, it appears that holding office corrupts.

So why are there such low quality politicians? We have seen arguments for it being the result of having nothing to inspire high quality candidates to run for political office: bad politicians as a result of self-selection. Other explanations, like that which Besley and Coate (1997) present, point to coordination problems on the part of voters as the main cause of the poor quality of the political ruling class. This model focuses on voting behaviour and the ways in which voters fail to organise themselves to be able to agree on the best quality candidates.

Besley and Case (1995) analyse principal-agency problems in the context of vote seeking and tax setting in the US. Their starting point is that there is an asymmetry of information between voters and politicians and that there are good and bad types of politicians, the common conundrum. They offer that citizens in neighbouring constituencies can gather evidence from their neighbours in order to judge their representatives. Having accepted that constituencies that exist side-by-side experience correlated shocks, it follows that “...agents use the performance of others as a benchmark”, a kind of yardstick competition (Besley and Case, 1995: 26). Their study is specifically geared to assess variations in local tax-setting structures and the correlated effect on electoral competition. However, it speaks to the larger issue of the negative impact of asymmetric information on the public’s ability to judge their representative and how it can be overcome as well. While the misbehaviours of a neighbouring MP are not directly relevant to whether a voter punishes their MP for their bad behaviour, it does address the fact that members of the electorate can seek out information in order to better judge their politicians.

2.7 Partisan effects and political judgements

The last few sections were dedicated to elucidating a space in the political landscape for voters to use elections as an accountability mechanism to judge MPs based on their individual characteristics and not on sweeping judgements based on national parties. This space was carved out of a body of literature dedicated to exploring the institutional mechanisms and features of the UK electoral system that make it difficult for voters to check their representatives. There is also a significant literature on how partisanship shapes political perceptions that is integral to understanding the research questions at hand in this piece. While it is still the contention of this work that it is important to explore the possibility of an electorate that holds their representatives to account via elections, it would be unfair and misguided to ignore the substantial body of research on the pervasive effects of party loyalty.

The scholarly conversation on the connection between party affiliation and electoral choices and behaviours is firmly rooted in the ideas of Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes's 1960 book, *The American Voter*. Commonly known as the 'Michigan School of partisan identification', the authors argue that electoral behaviour can be largely understood via "the role of enduring partisan commitments in shaping attitudes towards political objects" (Campbell et al., 1960: 135). Partisan loyalties are developed early in life and stay with a person throughout the duration of their lives, referred to as the "unmoved mover" of political life. This perspective has directly informed masses of research on the subject. The emergence of rational choice theories in the 1960s and 1970s made the takeaway message of *The American Voter* seem too cut and dry. Surely it cannot be that static.

The so-called revisionist response to the arguments of Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes's (1960) theory is careful to acknowledge the merits of their work, but to offer an alternative reading of partisanship. Fiorina (1981: 84) describes party identification as "a running tally of retrospective evaluations of party promises and performance". This perspective mirrors discussions

on the valence model of voting behaviour wherein the electorate pays attention to past performance in order to judge the potential for future benefits (Achen, 1989).

Critics of this mode of thinking, such as Bartels (2002), point to partisan bias as being taken for granted in revisionist analyses of party identification. Revisionists, for example, take the appearance of shifts in government approval evaluations as evidence of a lack of strong partisan commitment. They downgrade the element of party loyalty in the analysis while propping up the perspective that beliefs and evaluations do change when it in fact plays a significant part in informing all political calculations (Bartels, 2002: 119–120). Bartels' (2002) critique of unbiased political learning (Gerber and Green, 1999) finds firmly in favour with Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes's (1960) reading of the political landscape through a series of direct tests of partisan bias on the individual level and a review of the theoretical framework of the Bayesian model of rational learning. Party identification is considered to be a perceptual filtration system through which voters see what is most favourable to them (Campbell et al., 1960).

The issues raised by the debate have invariably led to research on the relationship between partisanship and political learning as well its effect on performance and responsibility attribution. The world is not black and white, but rather functions in shades of grey. Therefore, although Bartels (2002: 130) finds that “partisan bias is widespread and that its effects are not significantly mitigated by access to objective political information” there must be variation in the degree to which people exercise their biases. As political knowledge is costly and time consuming, voters employ politicians to learn about things that may affect them to enable them to be in a better position to make important choices. They also must use heuristics to help with political learning. “Citizens make use of simple informational shortcuts long familiar to political scientists under other names: party images, ideologies, and the like” (Ferejohn, 1990: 11). The next logical question is the subject of Shani's

(2006) paper: Does access to political information affect the effect of partisan bias on political perceptions?

For the purposes of this study, political knowledge is defined as “factual information about politics” (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 10). A line is drawn between individuals who are motivated to ascertain new political knowledge and those who are not. There are a number of contrasting perspectives as to which group will be more or less likely to be biased. For instance, uninformed citizens could be the most biased as they have a desire to reach the ‘correct’ conclusion, but have a low threshold for actual political learning and a general lack of interest in politics and, so, will make decisions based on partisan loyalty (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996: 114). However, voters with high knowledge levels may display the most biased behaviour because they have invested great amounts of time in their belief system and will therefore fight to preserve it (Lodge and Taber, 2000: 211). This point is linked to Berelson, Lazarsfeld and McPhee’s assertion (1954) that the best educated and informed have fewer misperceptions.

Shani (2006) finds that “political knowledge does not correct for partisan bias in perception of ‘objective’ conditions, nor does it mitigate the bias. Instead, unfortunately, it enhances the bias; party identification colours the perceptions of the most politically informed citizens far more than relatively less informed citizens” (31). The prospect for democratic accountability is bleak. If the best informed are recognising partisan cues and signal devices, but still voting along loyalty lines then elections are not the game-changer that one would hope them to be. Dealing with the reality of a biased electorate (Ferejohn, 1990) makes the mission of democratic elections all the more difficult.

Research from Blais and his co-authors (2010) continues this discussion. In their piece, they recognise that partisan predispositions are crucial to making political judgements, but separate the issue of perception of objective facts and partisan bias. As discussed in Zaller’s (1992: 121) work, partisan bias appears at higher levels of political awareness because an individual is more likely to

recognise the cueing message or heuristics and can judge it in relation to his or her pre-existing partisan affiliation. Therefore, the most informed are the best at perceiving objective facts. In their analysis of public reaction to a major political scandal in Canada, the authors demonstrate that partisan bias never disappears, but it can be separated from a well-informed voter's ability to perceive objective facts (Blais et al., 2010). In this way, they support the perspective on partisan loyalty espoused in *The American Voter* and at the same time demonstrate that partisan affiliation does not necessarily mean a voter's party identification blocks their ability to digest objective information. Further, they show that the level of political knowledge does matter relative to a citizen's level of discernment (Gaines et al., 2007).

The question of whether partisanship informs governmental performance evaluations and electoral outcomes is central to a number of studies. Tilley and Hobolt (2011) explore the dynamics of the "perceptual screen" of partisanship by examining two contrasting perspectives. Through an experimental design, they test whether voters are able to make selective evaluations and can change their view on policy performance or if voters alter who it is they hold responsible for policy performance, referred to as selective attribution (Tilley and Hobolt, 2011: 3). Their findings support both the selective evaluation and selective attribution mechanisms, but with stronger support for people engaging in selective attribution. By demonstrating that voters are better able to adjust their view on who is responsible for outcomes in two policy sectors (healthcare and the economy) the authors provide evidence for the pervasive role of partisanship in political judgements (Campbell et al., 1960, Bartels 2002). As Johnston (2006: 347) concludes, "[s]trong evidence indicates an impact of partisan predisposition on opinion and values, on perceptions of performance and of candidates, on issue-position imputations for candidates, and on the vote itself."

Chang and Kerr's (2009) research on the relationship between a voter's attitude towards corruption and partisanship is directly related to the connection between constituents and their

representatives and, subsequently, their perception of his or her salacious behaviour. The authors explore corruption from two different angles. The first is voter perception that a politician has engaged in corrupt practices and the second an investigation into the reasons for which corruption might be tolerated by voters. They posit that an insider-outsider framework is the causal mechanism by which voters' attitudes towards corruption are formulated. This thesis mirrors the tenets of the personal vote in that a voter who enjoys insider status will have a different reaction to individual political behaviour compared with those on the outside, i.e. a personal connection with a representative may affect how a voter judges his or her behaviour.

This theory is tested using Afrobarometer data on 18 sub-Saharan African countries. Chang and Kerr find that "...patronage insiders, although perceiving more corruption, ironically are more forgiving about it. Meanwhile, partisan and ethnic insiders tend to perceive less corruption...we suggest that instrumental voters are less likely to base their vote on corruption as long as the incumbent 'brings home the bacon'" (2009: 4). This set of results is significant to this research. It sheds light on the paradox that corrupt politicians could enjoy high re-election rates. For instance, Reed (2005) finds that Japanese legislators who were formally convicted of corruption charges enjoyed increases in their vote share at the next election. It also demonstrates variants of the personal vote outside of the US context.

As an extension to the literature on partisanship discussed above, there is work dedicated to investigating the impact of partisan bias in media coverage and, specifically, how it affects the treatment of political scandals. In their article, Puglisi and Snyder (2008) approach two distinct aspects of this issue. They first analyse general coverage bias of political scandals. Then they explore partisan journalism in relation to theories of information acquisition: do readers consume news for the sake of knowledge or to confirm prior beliefs? To the issue of general coverage bias, the authors find a tremendous bias along partisan lines in approximately 200 US newspapers. They investigate 35

scandals across this broad range of papers and demonstrate that newspapers with a specific political leaning give higher levels of coverage to political scandals involving the opposition party. For instance, Democratic-leaning papers (defined as those that are likely to endorse Democratic candidates) give more coverage to scandals involving Republican politicians (Puglisi and Synder, 2008: 27). This effect is found not only in the opinion section of papers, but also in the news section. While they note that the attention paid to political scandal as a subject is relatively small in comparison to other topics the “differential coverage of Republican *versus* Democratic scandals by a newspaper with a propensity to endorse Democratic candidates which is one standard deviation higher would be larger by around 26 percent” (Puglisi and Synder, 2008: 27). It follows that the magnitude of the coverage bias is, in fact, very large.

The issue of whether newspaper readers use the news as a means to learn new information or to merely confirm their pre-existing beliefs directly informs whether or not news providers will slant their coverage. In their 2006 piece, Gentzkow and Shapiro demonstrate that media firms distort their reporting in order to conform to consumers’ prior beliefs. This is because readers with definitive *a priori* beliefs are unlikely to believe coverage providing information that contradicts their previous knowledge. In turn, they will dismiss the coverage as inaccurate and write the source off (Gentzkow and Shapiro, 2006: 282), a prospect that is at odds with the main mission of newspapers to firstly provide accurate information, but secondarily to sell as many papers as possible.

The other side of this argument is that news consumers do so in order to obtain new information in the hopes of formulating better and well-researched opinions. In this scenario, moderate and independent-thinking readers are the prime targets for newspapers as it may be possible to affect their perspective and, eventually, make them into loyal readers. Puglisi and Snyder (2008: 27) find that “biased coverage of scandals ‘panders’ to the partisan leaning of readers...only for those scandals which are local – i.e. scandals involving politicians that are based in the same area where the

newspaper is sold”. In this way, there is room for both theories of news consumption with the differentiation in slanted coverage relating to whether the coverage is based on a local or national event.

2.8 Concluding remarks

There is a wealth of already extant research that directly informs this work. This research is related to a variety of fields. The literature on the use of elections as an accountability mechanism and the correlated moral hazard and adverse selection issues are of critical importance. As an extension, the impact of the personal vote and past research on public perceptions of political corruption is appropriate to an analysis of the impact of political controversies on individual MP's vote shares, the decision to stand down and perceptions of MP behaviour in the UK. The UK institutional context, with its dominant party system, is a crucial factor in any assessment of these questions. The impact of partisan loyalty and its correlating effect on performance evaluations of governments and individuals also directly relates to an evaluation of public perception of political controversies because it addresses the (limited) potential for a personal connection to an MP overshadowing a long-lasting partisan affiliation. Although most of the research on the subject has focused on scandals and corruption, it lays the foundation for an extension to the broader category of controversy. This review has, hopefully, given the literature on all of these topics its due consideration.

Chapter 3: Case selection, definitions and coding

3.1 Case selection

Political controversies and scandals have always affected political careers in the UK. Famed debacles such as the Marconi Affair (1912), the Profumo Affair (1963), and John Major's sleazy Tories of the mid-1990s and their antics are just a few outstanding examples of episodes so famous they are engrained into the national political culture. Oft referenced and easily recognisable by most followers of politics, controversy has been a prominent player in elections throughout the last century. Further, there are a number of key characteristics that make the UK an excellent case study to look at the impact of controversies and scandals on elections and political careers.

It may be too readily accepted that there is little, or no, personal accountability in British politics. The party-centredness of the Westminster system is most likely the central factor in this oversight as the Prime Minister (PM) is charged with directing and managing the party (Alderman and Cross, 1985: 387; Dewan and Myatt, 2008: 3; Jones and Hudson, 1996). In turn, this system of party management leaves individual party members with, seemingly, little room to manipulate their own fates.

It is often claimed that the importance of the personal vote in the UK (Cain et al., 1987) is generally overstated. As a consequence, it can be assumed that MPs have little or no incentive to build a personal reputation. Party identification is strong enough in the UK to carry them to wins or losses. Further, with levels of local campaign spending low in the UK generally (Pattie and Johnston, 2004: 798) and level of import of the local media quite weak (Cain et al., 1987) it could be difficult for an MP to develop a personal reputation within his/her constituency.

While the points made above have their merits, the use of single member districts in the UK point towards a clear connection between a geographically defined group of voters and their

representatives. As a result of ever-increasing partisan dealignment, and a correlated decrease in class-based voting, it can be argued that the electorate is more interested in their MP's behaviour than ever before (Kam, 2009). This type of thinking, foundational to the personal vote literature, is rooted in the fact that attentiveness to politics is strongly correlated to representative visibility, understood as contact with representatives, including activities like receiving mail, meeting them personally and seeing them on TV (Cain et al., 1987: 33–34). Further, the frequency with which MPs hold surgeries and effectively handle casework has been shown to enhance their personal reputations (Herrera and Yawn, 1999). These findings point to the potential impact of an MP's behaviour on their electoral outcomes.

An interesting corollary to the notion that MPs will be held accountable for their actions on the constituency level is the role of information. As discussed previously, the electorate is flooded with information about politicians throughout his/her tenure. The theoretical literature on political agency points to the significance of information in retrospective voting in relation to disciplining officials for problems caused by moral hazard or adverse selection (Ferejohn, 1986; Alesina and Tabellini, 2008; Besley, 2006). To go one step further, it is commonly accepted that greater weight is given to negative information relative to equal positive information because “negative stimuli somehow stand out against a generally positive background...[and] people are more strongly motivated to avoid costs than to approach gains” (Lau, 1985: 132; Lodge et al., 1989). As an extension, newspaper articles about MP behaviour should be an excellent data source to track the effect of political controversy on political careers and election outcomes. The British case provides a setting in which to test how negative stimuli affect the individual reputations of MPs and the party as a whole. Newspapers and media reports are also monitored by political parties that use them to track their outward image. In this way, newspaper articles are key to affecting the electorate and politicians themselves vis-à-vis their perceptions of MP behaviour.

Any year can be a big year for controversy. In recent history, the Labour and Conservative parties have yet to make it through a general election cycle without at least a few major, attention-grabbing controversies that have affected their overall reputations respectively. As a consequence, selecting a period on which to focus is no easy task. There can be little doubt that it takes multiple offenses and, accordingly, many years to tarnish the reputation of a political party. Accordingly, a major controversy or scandals can be the proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back” and finally push a government out of office. This reading of political cycles is particularly relevant to the long tenures that the Conservative and Labour parties (18 and 13 years respectively) served over the last 30 or so years. In light of this, a comparison of controversies at the end of a political era (i.e. fall of government) is the most useful time period to look at in order to address the research questions posed for this study. I therefore analyse controversies between April 1992 and May 1997, when the Conservative Government lost to Tony Blair’s New Labour, and May 2005 to May 2010 when Labour was defeated by the current coalition Government.

The rest of this chapter delves deeper into my methodology. It explores the source selection process as well as the way in which I code individual scandals and controversies. It provides a full explanation, and examples, of the types of newspaper articles that indicate a controversy. It also highlights some preliminary descriptive statistics that break down the type of controversies on a per party basis. Having fully explained my methodology for developing my main independent variable, political controversy, I then turn my focus to individual MPs’ background characteristics and their role in this puzzle as well as explain the dependent variables, the decision to retire and MP vote shares in the following chapter.

3.2 Source selection

The differentiation between a controversy, scandal and a charge of corruption is fundamental to this research. It is not that difficult to discover if a formal charge of corruption has been levied against a political official. All major newspapers cover such events. In contrast, it is incredibly difficult to pinpoint exactly what signifies a controversy and what does not. Past work on the subject has shied away from setting out a definition, opting instead to focus on allegations or charges. If this research only tracked criminal allegations it would miss the opportunity to measure whether an MP's behaviour, inside and outside the HOC, has an effect on his or her electoral success and future career plans.

Therefore, in this research, controversy is defined by information that has garnered national news attention which is negative, intended to disparage, and/or reflects an episode that could hurt an MP's career. The range of incidents included within this definition is, unfortunately, a necessary evil. Scandals are a subset of controversies and are included. Most events that would be deemed a scandal relate to issues of sex or financial impropriety as seen with the coverage of the Conservatives in the mid-1990s and the MPs chosen for analysis in Farrell, McAllister and Studlar's (1998) examination of the electoral effect of sleaze in the 1997 election. More generally, though, scandal is defined by the five main features it exhibits:

1. The violation of widely-held moral or ethical norms;
2. An initial secrecy surrounding the alleged scandalous behaviour;
3. At least some in the wider public who disapprove of the scandalous behaviour;
4. The public (and often media-driven) expression of their disapproval; and
5. The real risk that revelations surrounding the scandal may damage participants' reputations. (Thompson, 2000: 13–14)

This definition certainly fits many of the episodes analysed in this work, but not necessarily all as there are events that do not violate ethical norms but have the potential to greatly damage the reputation and career of an MP. These are, for example, instances of major professional failings, which are referred to as performance controversies in this research.

It follows that since the parameters by which one is to distinguish an event from being a controversy or not have been clarified, it is best to return to the underlying intuition behind the work: each election brings a clean slate for an elected official and all the information that accumulates about him/her over the period in office is what voters base their decisions upon at the next election. In addition, that information is also what the party leadership has to contend with when supporting candidates as well as affecting an individual MP's personal decision to retire. Overall, if recognised in national newspapers as negative it would fall under the umbrella of this type of information and therefore be counted as it may colour the electorate's perception of the MP in question and affect his or her reputation within the party.

While the definition of a controversy may be blurry compared to a formal charge of corruption, the parameters set out above do not leave space for random rumour rumbblings. Newspapers that consistently cover controversy-based stories and are known for this penchant are not necessarily the most reliable. For instance, it is widely accepted that *The Sun* and *The Daily Mail* have a way of scandalising everything – the latest *potentially* indecent tête-à-tête or illicit romp is always front-page news. While stories of misbehaviour will boost sales for any publication as the public is interested in the gory details, it follows that for the purposes of this research a controversy only becomes important if the broadsheets pick it up. Broadsheets are not only the most respected papers, but they also set the news agenda for the top television news providers, i.e. the BBC and Sky News. Therefore, sourcing information on controversies directly from the broadsheets is a logical and legitimate choice.

3.3 Approach and coding

As the news is the most readily available way in which we can connect to our public officials it is an excellent medium for analysis. The news tells us about them, what they are doing, successes, failures and future projects. While it often comes with an opinion or bias, it is a natural extension of

the nature of news coverage that a study of its reporting would be the best way in which to track and analyse the impact of negative information on MPs. There is no other source that follows the issues as closely.

In order to accomplish this, the names of all MPs elected in 1992 and 2005¹² were searched for in *The Times*, *Sunday Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Observer* for the duration between the 1992 and 1997 general elections (1 April 1992 – 5 May 1997) and between the 2005 and 2010 general elections (5 May 2005 – 6 May 2010). *The Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* were also searched for the crop of MPs serving between 2005 and 2010 as *The Telegraph* became electronically available from 2000 onwards. This was all done on NexisUK, an electronic media search engine. While these newspapers are generally acknowledged to have specific political leanings it is fair to assume that between at least two broadsheet publications each and every controversy would be covered.

Initially, in pursuit of discovering political controversies associated with specific MPs, keyword searches containing the MPs name and the term ‘scandal’, ‘misbehaviour’, ‘controversy’ or ‘wrongdoing’ were conducted. I found that this approach often missed events that, for the purposes of this analysis, would be deemed a controversy. Therefore, the searches were carried out using the MP’s name as the keyword or his/her name and respective party affiliation (i.e. Clare Short+Labour). While this returns an excessive number of results it also ensures that nothing will be missed.

The total number of articles returned for each search was recorded as well as the number of articles for each of the publications utilised. When a political controversy was identified, the number

¹² In order to maintain consistency across the sample, MPs who were elected in by-elections between the 1992 and 1997 elections and the 2005 and 2010 elections were eliminated as they did not serve an equal amount of time as the rest of the those in the HOC. MPs who lost the whip during the general election period, never regained it and sat as in Independent MP or as an MP for another party were also eliminated as the effect of their actions would be difficult to measure because A) in the lead-up to the next election they could not be sanctioned by the same party that they began with and B) their vote share could reflect their (new) partisan affiliation as opposed to a commentary on their actions. In addition, there were significant boundary changes for the 1997 and 2010 elections. To address this issue, I use notional vote shares calculated by Rallings and Thrasher (1995, 2007). The constituency of Poplar and Limehouse had to be eliminated from the 2010 election analysis as the notional vote share for George Galloway, a sitting MP for the Respect Party, was not calculated (for further explanation see Rallings and Thrasher, 1995: 6).

of articles that focused on the event was counted and its relative seriousness coded into a strength of controversy rating that I devised for this project. One to 14 articles on the controversy was deemed not serious, 15 to 24 articles meant that it was a relatively serious issue and if there were 25 or more articles on the subject it was considered very serious.¹³ Further, the controversies were split into five categories, relating to a (1) policy, (2) sexual impropriety, (3) financial issue, (4) a performance failing relating to an MP's professional duties and, lastly, (5) an 'other' category.

An MP was coded as having had a policy controversy if his or her disagreement with the Government caused them to resign from their position (i.e. they were a member of the Government or the frontbench), lose/give up the whip or garnered negative coverage for their stance on a specific policy. This category includes cases wherein the MP in question made a particularly aggressive attack, such as Ed Davey and Sarah Teather's letter to Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy asking him to stand down which was signed by 25 Liberal Democrats (1 June 2006). Teather and Davey were coded as having had a controversy as opposed to all those who signed the letter as they were the primary aggressors in this instance and not just part of the group. I employed the same logic in my coding for the Maastricht rebels (1994) and highlighted the eight main rebels as having had a controversy as opposed to all Conservative MPs involved in the ordeal.¹⁴ If I were to include all MPs who have been involved in a rebellion, the controversy variable would not pick up any variation. A further example of a policy controversy was James Purnell's resignation from the Cabinet on 5 June 2009 due to his inability to support Gordon Brown as leader any longer.

Instances of sexual impropriety are straight forward as are those controversies in the 'performance' category. Controversies relating to a financial issue encompass issues centred on

¹³ In the end, I was unable to use this rating system in my analysis as there were many cases of MPs with multiple controversies included in the study, thereby rendering a strength of controversy rating meaningless. The description of the scale is included here as it was part of my methodology in creating my dataset.

¹⁴ It should be noted that Richard Body was also coded as having a policy controversy since he resigned the whip in a show of solidarity with the main rebels. This fits into my coding as he was a prominent player in the rebellion and certainly not a follower.

bribery, conflicts of interest wherein there is a monetary component and those instances where goods (including holidays) are provided with the hopes of the provider receiving a gain (i.e. having a question tabled in parliament), or blatant financial impropriety. Prominent financial controversies include those embroiled in the ‘Cash-for-Questions’ affair (October 1994) and the ‘Cash-for-Access’ scandal (March 2010). Other examples include issues relating to undeclared financial interests (David Blunkett in November 2005) or Harriet Harman’s acceptance of an illegal donation to her deputy leadership campaign (November 2007).

Controversies deemed ‘other’ were those that were especially difficult to neatly categorise. An example of a controversy that fell into the ‘other’ category was Jack Straw’s (October 2006) public objection to Muslim women wearing burkas which brought a lot of negative attention to him, especially as he was a member of the Government at the time. Or Ann Cryer’s request that the NHS warn parents, especially Asian immigrants, of the dangers of inbreeding (February 2008). Additionally, I kept track of how many controversies an MP was involved in using dichotomous coding for their first controversy as well as any additional controversies.¹⁵

The parliamentary expenses scandal of 2009–2010 garnered a tremendous amount of attention in the press and across the UK. It affected over half of MPs serving in the HOC. As a result, a binary variable based on whether or not an MP was asked to repay money to the HOC in Sir Thomas Legg’s report (February 2010), coded as 1 if they were asked to repay and 0 if no repayment was requested, was created. Further, it is readily accepted that *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sunday Telegraph* were the principle vehicles for informing the public about the details of MP’s claims. In turn, MPs’ names were also searched via NexisUK to see if the *specific* details of their claims were discussed. It was found that there were instances where an MP’s name might appear in *The Telegraph* and not the Legg Report or vice versa and so the variable representing whether or not an MP was implicated

¹⁵ An MP’s first controversy was coded 1,0 and all further controversies were combined into one variable encompassing two or more controversies, also coded dichotomously (1,0).

during the expenses scandal is based on both sources – they might be mentioned in the Legg Report or *The Daily Telegraph* or both.¹⁶

As mentioned above, deciding which episodes meet my criteria of what qualifies as a controversy and what does not is an admittedly subjective exercise. The parameters were left loose intentionally so as to encompass a broad range of types of offenses as well as leave room for interpretation of events that may negatively affect an MP's reputation in the eyes of the electorate and/or the party administration. This is principally because I have chosen to include work-related decisions and performance judgements for their impact on future career successes.

While there are too many categories of controversy to make it a worthwhile exercise to present samples of all the types of articles that red-flagged an episode of 'controversy', it is useful to get to know the data, at least at the surface level, so as to understand my coding choices. For instance, one of the more notable sex scandals of the Major era was Richard Spring's 'Three-in-a-Bed' scandal, a story that *The News of the World* was the first to break. Within two days of the story coming out, all the major broadsheets had picked it up thereby meeting my journalistic threshold criterion. The first article in *The Times* was published on 10 April 1995 entitled 'Sex Claims Interrupt MP's Jolly in the Sun.' It read:

RICHARD SPRING was on an all-expenses-paid fact-finding visit to the Canary Islands when his government career came to an end.

The MP for the safe Tory seat of Bury St Edmunds had arrived on Friday and was being wined and dined with seven other MPs by the Canary Island regional government when the telephone call came through from the *News of the World*. From the comfort of his Pounds 100-a-night hotel in Lanzarote, Mr Spring, 48, a divorced father of two, suddenly found himself fighting to save his political career. He was understood to have flown back to Britain either yesterday or late on Saturday.

The newspaper reported details of an alleged affair with Odette Nightingale, a Sunday school teacher, and her lover Chris Holmes. Ms Nightingale, 30, a divorced mother of two, told the

¹⁶ Chapter Seven is a full investigation of the expenses scandal co-authored with Dr Nick Vivyan and Dr Markus Wagner. It goes into greater detail about the coding of this variable and presents results focused solely on this scandal and its effect on the election and voter perceptions of their MP.

newspaper that she and Mr Holmes, 48, a Pounds 120,000-a-year executive at the pension company NPI, had dinner at Mr Spring's house in Victoria, central London, last Sunday.

Tory sources said Mr Spring's fate was sealed by the newspaper reporting detailed transcripts of graphic and unflattering remarks at the dinner about colleagues, including John and Norma Major, and members of the Royal Family.

Mr Spring initially denied the allegations. Asked if Ms Nightingale's story was true, he is reported as saying: "I'm saying, well, I'm just telling you, I just don't know. I don't have an answer. I have no words for it."... Mr Spring, a Thatcherite who became an MP in 1992, was given a public endorsement by his constituency party yesterday after an emergency meeting of officers. Nigel Roman, the local party chairman, said: "He has done the honourable thing by resigning. He has been a gentleman over this."... Lord Henniker said: "His resignation is a surprise. It seems very sudden. He is a capable chap."...

Mr Spring telephoned Sir Patrick Mayhew at home early yesterday to discuss the disclosures. After discussions with Sir Patrick and the Tory whips he decided to tender his resignation. Sir Patrick accepted it with regret (Pierce, *The Times*, 10 April 1995).

This particular article is an excellent example of an opening piece on a controversy. It is completely focused on the event and includes all of the available details. It is important to note that not all articles that I consider in the purview of related to a specific controversy must be 100 % focused on the event, as in this case. While they usually are around the time that the story first appears (especially if new details come in over time), I still consider articles published during the entire period that a controversy makes the news.¹⁷ I use the date this article was published, 10 April 1995, as the start date of the episode which is used when calculating the relative seriousness of the controversy (based on the number of articles published on it after, and including, the story which first discussed it) as well as a timing variable that encompasses the number of months and weeks from the date the controversy first came to the public's attention until the next general election. I chose to do

¹⁷ An example of a controversy reappearing later on, even after the resignation of the MP, is that Richard Spring's sex scandal resurfaced during the investigation into Jonathan Aitken's June 1996 alleged affair with a prostitute. In this way, the strength of the controversy lives on far past its time as a focal news story in that it continues to damage the party and the MPs involved personally. It is for that reason that all articles discussing the controversy throughout the general election period are included as evidence as to how serious the controversy was.

this as it is logical to expect that a controversy would have a greater impact the closer it surfaces to the next election as it will be fresher in the public's, and party's, minds.¹⁸

The press spends an incredible amount of time, and words, evaluating and delving into the work of government officials. As discussed earlier, it is their job to act as a go-between, keeping the public informed of the major decisions the government takes and the consequences. Although journalistic bias and political leanings become an issue in judgements levied on public officials, absorbing information from a variety of news sources is the electorate's best way of evaluating the government's work. As a consequence, I thought it useful to put forth a sample of an article that indicated a crisis of confidence in the abilities of a Government official to do his job properly.

Nearly a year after the Whitemoor prison debacle (December 1994) when six prisoners, including Paul Magee and other IRA members, escaped from the prison's secure unit after successfully smuggling a gun into the jail, Michael Howard, then Home Secretary, came under fire again. Although all escapees were recaptured in the Whitemoor prison break, the event did a lot of damage to Howard's reputation. While two lower level officials bore the brunt of the fallout from the Whitemoor affair, when three prisoners escaped from Parkhurst prison in January 1995, the scrutiny on Howard increased even further, eventually culminating in him being called upon to resign his post. An excellent example of an article where Howard's post was attacked was published on 18 October 1995 entitled 'Labour Steps up Pressure on Howard'. It read:

LABOUR increased the pressure for Michael Howard's resignation yesterday when he was accused of being "less than frank" to the Commons over the management of Britain's jails. He will be pressed further today when the Opposition stages an emergency debate on the Prison Service.

Tony Blair challenged the Home Secretary's claim that he did not interfere in the day-to-day running of the service, alleging that he had personally intervened after the Parkhurst escape in January to demand the suspension of the Governor, John Marriott.

¹⁸ Other examples of sex scandals are Greg Barker's decision to leave his wife for his male interior decorator ('Tory MP Leaves Wife and Three Children for a Man', *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 October 2006) and Paul Keetch's alleged affair with the wife of a prominent SAS author ('Lib Dem MP Having an 'Affair' with SAS Author's Wife', *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 November 2009).

Mr Blair also alleged that when Derek Lewis the head of the service who was dismissed on Monday objected that this was an "operational" matter, Mr Howard threatened to instruct him to do it. Labour sources went further and claimed that a senior Home Office official had told Mr Lewis that if he refused he would himself be sacked.

The Home Office later denied Mr Blair's version of events, which is understood to have been based on information supplied by Mr Lewis and Liz Symons, General Secretary of the First Division Association, of which he is a member.

It said: "The Home Secretary did not tell Mr Lewis that the Governor of Parkhurst should be suspended immediately. The Home Secretary did not threaten to instruct Mr Lewis to suspend the Governor of Parkhurst. And the Home Secretary did not announce to the House of Commons that afternoon that the Governor of Parkhurst had been suspended. Mr Marriott was moved to other duties in the Prison Service."

But the union said the Home Office statement was "incomplete and misleading", and it intends to challenge it on Mr Lewis's behalf today.

In the Commons, Mr Howard was strongly defended by the Prime Minister, who told Mr Blair that whatever action he took was "entirely proper and within his remit as Home Secretary answerable to this House"...

Judge Stephen Tumim, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, also joined in the attack on Mr Howard, dismissing his claim that he was not responsible for operational matters. "If you are dividing policy and operations it means the Home Secretary is not responsible for anything at all. That means the Home Secretary takes credit but is free of responsibility. It's a bogus distinction."

Labour's key claim against Mr Howard is that although Mr Lewis had decided that Mr Marriott should be moved from Parkhurst after the escape, he was deeply opposed to suspending him. Senior sources maintain that Mr Howard would not be deflected, and they are confident that Mr Lewis would back their version were he asked to appear before the Commons Home Affairs Committee.

Mr Straw said last night: "Mr Howard has been less than frank with the House of Commons about his involvement in operational matters."...

The appearance of Ann Widdecombe, the Prisons Minister, at the managers' meeting in Central Hall, Westminster, surprised many governors... Her statement was met with jeers and laughter, while one governor stood up and said: "I hope you understand in what low esteem you and Michael Howard are held" (Webster and Ford, *The Times*, 15 October 1995).

The article clearly highlights a 'performance' controversy for Michael Howard. It contains key characteristics, such as a call for resignation as well as a description of the ways in which Howard

underperformed, which indicate that Mr Howard's ability to perform his job at an adequate level was questioned.¹⁹ As in Richard Spring's sex scandal discussed above, the date the main article was written was recorded in order to calculate the amount of time that elapsed between the controversy and the next general election.

Financial controversies always arouse a great amount of attention. The notion that public officials use their office to broker secret deals and obtain perks is one that particularly resonates with the public as MPs continually complain about their low salaries and quality of life while earning significantly more than the average Briton. Naturally, the electorate's interest is piqued when news of an MP's financial misstep hits the press. The 2009–2010 expenses scandal is by far the most notable in recent history. An example of the type of financial scandal that was sure to affect the MPs involved was the March 2010 cash-for-influence affair involving three ex-Cabinet ministers. Stephen Byers was most seriously affected as he described himself as "sort of like a cab for hire" during a sting to expose the intervention of MPs on behalf of private sector companies. An article from *The Daily Telegraph* describes the issue:

A CABINET minister admitted yesterday that he had a private conversation with Stephen Byers over a controversial deal to renationalise the East Coast railway line.

However, Lord Adonis said it was "pure fantasy" to suggest that his decisions surrounding National Express had been influenced by the former transport secretary or that the pair had "come to any arrangement".

The disclosure was seized on by the Conservatives, who have accused the Prime Minister of a "cover-up" after he ruled out a Whitehall investigation into the cash-for-influence scandal. Three former Cabinet ministers were suspended by the Labour Party last night over allegations that they were prepared to use their position to influence government policy for cash.

The party leadership was made aware that the feeling among Labour MPs was that a stand needed to be taken. Losing the whip is an ignominious end to the parliamentary careers of Stephen Byers, and Geoff Hoon. All three served many years as Cabinet ministers

¹⁹ Another example of a performance controversy was Hilary Benn's handling of the bovine Tuberculosis crisis, for which he faced a tremendous amount of criticism while Rural Affairs Secretary (July 2008).

under Tony Blair and Mr Hoon also served under Gordon Brown in two Cabinet posts. All three are standing down at the election and Margaret Moran, a fourth Labour MP, has also had the whip withdrawn...

In a secret recording, Mr Byers - who described himself as "sort of like a cab for hire" - alleged that he had persuaded Lord Adonis to agree to a preferential deal involving National Express. Lord Adonis has angrily denied the allegation.

Mr Byers was also recorded claiming that he had intervened on behalf of Tesco to get Lord Mandelson to stop new food-labelling laws. Tesco said it did not discuss the matter with the Labour MP and Lord Mandelson said he had "no recollection" of any such conversation.

Patricia Hewitt, the former health secretary, was secretly recorded saying she had helped a private health firm win a place on a government advisory panel. Eric Pickles, the Tory party's chairman, said: "This looks increasingly like a cover-up at the heart of government."

Mr Byers has tried to withdraw the comments he was recorded making, saying that he exaggerated his role. He insisted that he was not paid by Tesco or National Express. Last night, the Channel 4 *Dispatches* documentary also showed secretly recorded footage of three more politicians apparently offering to help the bogus lobbyists.

Baroness Morgan, a former senior aide to Tony Blair at Downing Street, boasted that she "knew the right people to scream at" on behalf of clients. Miss Moran, the disgraced Labour MP found to have abused her expenses, offered to help the undercover reporters make contact with ministers' special advisers. The only Conservative politician to be exposed by the sting was Sir John Butterfill. "I could organise a minister," he was recorded as saying...

Will there be any investigation? Mr Byers has reported himself to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. This is a different type of investigation that will examine whether the MP broke Commons rules on declaring work for outside firms – and undertaking paid advocacy. It is unlikely to report before the election, when Mr Byers has already announced he will be leaving Parliament (Winnett, *The Daily Telegraph*, 23 March 2010).

This article contains damning information for all MPs involved in the cash-for-influence controversy and was, therefore, used as evidence of a financial controversy for each of them. Episodes such as this are exactly the type of thing that aggravates the public and most certainly colours their perception of the MPs involved. Other examples of events that meet my criteria of indicating a financial scandal were Neil Hamilton and Tim Smith's role in the Cash-for-Questions scandal (October 1994).

The parameters for citing a controversy that fits into my ‘other’ category are the least clear-cut. It is obvious that being embroiled in an illicit tryst would tamper with one’s public reputation, but there are events in people’s lives and actions that they take which do not fit squarely into an obvious categorisation. For instance, Dr Des Turner, who has campaigned against drink driving, failed a breath test after crashing his car (January 2007). And the leaking of private emails between Desmond Swayne and David Cameron where he insulted fellow Conservative party members (July 2006) caused damage to the image of the party as a whole and, although he was still re-elected, Swayne’s reputation.

A revelation relating to members of an MP’s family can lead to a controversy for the MP themselves. For example, Peter Robinson was targeted in the aftermath of his wife’s affair with a teenage boy and subsequent financial scandal, which forced him to step aside from his position as First Minister of Northern Ireland for six weeks and seriously hurt his reputation (January 2010). These episodes are all examples of events that brought negative attention for the MP in question, but do not neatly fit into any particular category. Therefore, it was the best decision to create an ‘other’ category so as to encompass the range of hard-to-place episodes.

3.4 Descriptive statistics

From the crop of MPs (N=627) across all parties, who served between 1992 and 1997, 174 of them had a controversy. This comprises 25.2 % of the sample. Further, 27 of those MPs had two or more controversies during the period in question, which amounted to approximately 16 % of the sample having been involved in multiple episodes that attracted a significant amount of negative news attention. These numbers are quite high. Over 25 % of all MPs being involved in a controversy seems steep by any standards. However, it is important to consider the fact that this research is aimed at pinpointing negative information published in major national newspapers that could affect perception of MPs. It follows that some MPs’ actions may not fit colloquial notions of ‘right’ and

‘wrong’, but each one is in keeping with the idea that a controversy is something that is damaging to an MP’s personal or professional reputation.

It is logical to assume that the party in government would attract more news attention than MPs from other parties. While shadow cabinet members are of focal interest as well as perhaps frontbench opposition spokesmen, it is the party in power that is responsible for big policy decisions and is praised or criticised when things go wrong. Although the current situation with a coalition Government will inevitably complicate this perspective in that there is no longer one party to blame for political missteps and bad policy decisions, on the whole, this theory held true for the two election periods in question. Conservative MPs (N=323) were involved in the majority of the controversies between 1992 and 1997. Out of this group, 136 (approximately 42 %) had a controversy, 21 of whom (15.4 %) had two or more. This stands in stark contrast to the situation for Labour MPs (N=261) where only 33 party members had a controversy (12.6 %) and five MPs, roughly 15 % of those Labour MPs who had a controversy, had two or more during the period.

Table 3.1 illustrates the breakdown for each type of controversy for the entire sample and for the Conservative and Labour parties.

Table 3.1: Type of controversy 1997

Type of Controversy 1997

Type of Controversy	Conservative N=323	Labour N=261	Total N=627
Sexual	15 (11.0 %)	1 (3.0 %)	16 (9.2 %)
Financial	40 (29.4 %)	4 (12.1 %)	44 (25.3 %)
Policy	25 (18.4 %)	3 (9.1 %)	29 (16.7 %)
Performance	36 (26.5 %)	6 (18.2 %)	44 (25.3 %)
Other	20 (14.7 %)	19 (57.6 %)	41 (23.6 %)
Grand Total	136	33	174

The table shows that Labour and Conservative MPs were responsible for all financial controversies (47) that occurred during the period in question. They were involved in all (16) sexual scandals

during the 1992–1997 session of parliament with 15 relating to Conservative MPs. The overwhelming majority of MPs with controversies resulting from poor performance were Conservatives (83 %), which is logical as they were in government. Conservative MPs also had the majority of policy controversies (83 %) due in large part to the Maastricht rebellion and the fact that they were in power, thereby leaving more room to disagree with policies and to resign from the Government as a result. Labour and Conservative MPs had exactly the same amount of controversies that fell into the ‘other’ category.

Table 3.2 shows the breakdown for each type of controversy for all MPs and the Labour and Conservative party MPs by group for the 2005–2010 general election period.

Table 3.2: Type of controversy 2010

Type of Controversy 2010

Type of Controversy	Conservative (N=191)	Labour (N=340)	Total (N=618)
Sexual	3 (9.1 %)	3 (3.3 %)	10 (7.1 %)
Financial	9 (27.3 %)	12 (13.2 %)	21 (15.0 %)
Policy	5 (15.2 %)	26 (28.6 %)	37 (26.4 %)
Performance	6 (18.2 %)	32 (35.2 %)	41 (29.3 %)
Other	10 (30.3 %)	18 (19.8 %)	31 (22.1 %)
Grand Total	33	91	140

Across all parties (N=618), 140 MPs serving between 2005 and 2010 had a controversy, comprising approximately 23 % of the sample. This is roughly two per cent less than the group in office between 1992 and 1997.²⁰ Ninety-one Labour MPs (N=340), making up nearly 27 % of the sample, had a controversy, 17 of whom (18.7 %) had two or more. Of the Conservative MPs (N=191), 33 had a controversy (17.3 %) and five (15.2 %) of that group had two or more. In the 2005–2010 election period, MPs belonging to the party in power had almost triple the number of MPs with controversies

²⁰ It is important to remember that violations relating to the expenses scandal are not included as a controversy and, instead, are contained in the variable measuring whether or not an MP was implicated in the scandal. This issue is further addressed in Chapter Seven.

than their main opposition did whereas in the 1992-1997 period Conservative MPs had over four times the number of MPs with a controversy as compared with Labour MPs.

As previously mentioned, for the 2010 coding I separated financial scandal from scandal relating to *The Telegraph's* expenses' investigation. There were 21 non-expenses-related financial controversies between 2005 and 2010, which were almost evenly distributed between the main two parties (nine for Conservatives and 12 for Labour). There was an even distribution of sex scandals between the two main parties. Further, 32 of 41 performance-related controversies were charged to Labour MPs, which is not surprising as they were in power and, in turn, had more duties than their Conservative opposition, as well as had their relative performance more closely monitored by the press. The same logic applies to the discrepancy between the policy controversies for the two main parties as Labour MPs would have had more opportunity to have these types of disputes as they were in power and responsible for making more policies. Additionally, as in 1997, there were a number of controversies (31) that did not fit in with the definitive categories and were therefore coded as 'other'.

3.5 Concluding comments

The information presented in this chapter offers an introduction to the study and its main point of interest: political controversy. Examples of the types of newspaper articles that were used to determine whether or not a controversy had occurred demonstrate that random rumours were not considered. Each controversy was selected for the particular strength of negative news coverage and the correlated (potential) impact on an MP's career, whether that effect is one that will appear on election day through an MP's vote share or beforehand in a retirement decision.

Chapter 4: MPs and dependent variables – asking the right questions

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the main independent variable of interest in this study, political controversy. It highlighted the significant impact that controversies can have on a politician's career, especially when they garner national news coverage. This can lead to resignation calls or raise doubts about an MP's competency or ethics. They are also of huge interest to the public. Some types summon our inner nosiness from the depths of our core – the curiosity in us all to know other people's business despite whether it should be on display for us to pass judgement. Other types are far less salacious in content, but appeal to the adult side of our psyche by pushing us to ask hard questions such as whether or not our MPs and the Government are doing their job well and how we will vote in the next election. Moreover, in some cases, members of the electorate go one step further and focus on why they are making these decisions.

In this chapter, I first explain how the impact of political controversy is measured in greater detail and present basic descriptive statistics. Two dependent variables are used to analyse the effect of political controversy. The first is an MP's decision to retire from parliament and the second is an MP's vote share. These variables allow for measurement of the effect at two crucial stages; before the election and after the MP has chosen to stand again.

As for the subjects of the study, I consider MPs from all parties as a group as well as consider them on a per party basis. Because the Westminster system is often described as a 'two-horse race' the effects may be different depending on whether an MP is a member of the Conservative or Labour party. This chapter also discusses the other independent variables that I use to model the effect of political controversy. This research is dedicated to analysing the effects of individual MPs' behaviours on careers, therefore I include individual MP background characteristics, such as gender,

age and education in the analysis. By looking at these factors there is potential to unearth trends that demonstrate an impact of individual MP's background characteristics on political careers in addition to their behaviours. This chapter discusses previous studies that have looked at this effect and explains how this research extends prior analyses.

4.2 Background

In terms of an MP's career, there are three points at which controversy can directly affect it. This first occurs right after the news breaks. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, the press is apt to cover each and every misdemeanour. Therefore, a politician must immediately deal with the aftermath of his or her actions. He or she may be forced to resign a political post, if they hold one. The offender may comment on the event and proceed to engage in work to rehabilitate his or her image. Or, most commonly, an MP will not acknowledge the event, hoping that it will blow over quickly and they will be able to carry on with their business and that, in general, their personal lives will be largely left unscathed.

The second time an MP has to formally consider the issue is in the run-up to the next general election. Controversies of years past creep up at this time as the press tries to reinvigorate the electorate with the anger, angst and curiosity they felt when the story first broke. Further, newspapers are hungry for stories that will sell papers, increase their readership and reflect well on their ability to cover the general election and all its facets. The months immediately preceding an election witness many members of the public becoming interested in politics for the first time since the last election. Therefore, the press uses this time as an opportunity to publish engaging stories that will, hopefully, make casual readers into dedicated patrons. It follows that an MP may be re-confronted with his or her misbehaviours in the lead-up to an election. This reality begs the question of whether having been

embroiled in a controversy factors into an MP's decision to stand down from parliament and/or is it a point of consideration for the party administration?

If an MP passes these two hurdles and stands for re-election, then the third potential confrontation of controversy versus MP crops up. At this juncture, the electorate is directly involved in the treatment of the controversy. Naturally, there are cases where an MP has already been censured for his or her misbehaviour and removed from the party thereby forcing a by-election or being deselected, but in most cases MPs do not face the public until they stand for re-election. Therefore, the electorate is given the opportunity to use their vote to either hold an MP accountable for their actions or to let it go.²¹ Does political controversy affect an individual MP's vote share?²²

Each of these points represents an integral aspect of this study. The first represents the main independent variable, controversy. I have dealt with the treatment of this variable in the previous chapter, outlining the methodological approach to collecting data on political controversies and highlighting some preliminary descriptive statistics. The second and third correspond to the main questions that this research will ask of the data. Principally, it is charged with addressing whether or not controversy plays a part in an MP's decision to retire and what its effect, if any, is on an MP's vote share.

4.3 Dependent variables

The decision to retire from any career is, inevitably, a difficult calculation. In the case of a political career it is all the more complicated as there is no official age of retirement. In turn, when considering whether or not to step down from political office this paper ventures that while age is a significant factor, an MP's choice is also directly informed by considerations of outside job

²¹ This work does not assume that having been embroiled in a controversy is the only factor which informs a person's vote choice. It is, instead, suggesting that an election is the only time in which a member of the electorate is able to punish an MP for their behaviour.

²² It is important to note that a specific controversy may be mentioned any number of times over the course of a general election period, but the notion that it matters at three distinct points is reflective of its impact on an MP's career understood as the moment of exposure, the decision to retire or effect on vote share at the next election.

opportunities, his or her re-election chances and popularity with the electorate. It follows that the first main research question this work tests is whether there is a relationship between political controversy and the decision to retire. In order to show this relationship, this thesis assesses controversy as an independent variable for its impact on an MP's decision to stand down. It employs binary logistic regression and a dichotomous measure of whether an MP retired (1) or sought re-election (0) as the dependent variable.

Are politicians held individually accountable for their behaviour? This question is the main motivation behind the next research topic and dependent variable. To estimate the effect of political controversy on vote choice I use the vote share differential between what percentage an MP earned in 1992 and 1997, and 2005 and 2010 as the dependent variable. Incumbency has been demonstrated to have a very strong effect on electoral politics in the UK (e.g. Bowler and Karp, 2004). Extended tenures in office for individual MPs as well as parties in government speaks to that reality. For this reason, difference in vote share is a suitable dependent variable as it eliminates the need to use previous vote share (i.e. 1992 and 2005 percentage of the vote earned) as an independent variable. The significance of previous vote share in predicting the next election's vote eliminates the effect of other explanatory variables and, therefore, the model is better suited to addressing the impact of political controversy with the difference in vote share as the dependent variable. Further, it controls for the effect of time invariant constituency effects on vote share.

It is important to note that the substantial boundary changes to UK parliamentary constituencies for both the 1997 and 2010 elections complicate matters. I used notional vote share values to compensate for these changes. However, as my research question directly relates to issues of personal accountability it is important that I can directly measure the connection between an MP's action and his or her vote share. It follows that I will look at constituencies where there were no boundary changes as well as the entire sample of MPs (including those whose constituency

underwent boundary changes) separately. While the sample of MPs serving in a constituency that did not undergo any boundary changes is a fraction of the group in both 1997 and 2010, the results will be the purest representation of the answer to my research question. I chose to also include the results for all constituencies (even those with boundary changes) as extensive boundary changes are a regular feature of British political life and the results of this study may shed light on the practice of altering boundaries so regularly.

4.4 Standing down

When is it time to go? This question invariably affects all MPs at one point or another in their careers. As mentioned above, there are a whole host of reasons why an MP may decide to step down from parliament including outside job opportunities, his or her age, career progression within the HOC and, potentially, whether he or she has been embroiled in a controversy that has tainted the possibility for re-election. Table 4.1 includes information on the number of MPs across all parties who retired in 1997 and is also broken down by party. Additionally, it highlights the number of MPs who had controversies across all parties as well as how many involved members of the Labour and Conservative parties and data on how many MPs who had a controversy then retired before the 1997 election. Across all parties, 627 MPs are considered and when split by party affiliation there are 323 Conservative MPs and 261 Labour MPs in the sample.

Table 4.1: MP retirement 1997

	All Parties (N=627)	Conservative (N=323)	Labour (N=261)
Retired	116 (18.5 %)	73 (22.6 %)	38 (14.6 %)
Controversy	158 (25.2 %)	122 (37.8 %)	31 (11.9 %)
Retired with Controversy	39 (24.7 %)	31 (25.4 %)	5 (16.1 %)

Out of the 627 MPs in the sample, 116 stood down from parliament in the lead-up to the 1997 election, 18.5 % of MPs analysed. Unsurprisingly, more Conservative than Labour MPs retired as they held the majority of seats in the HOC. From a total of 323 Conservative MPs, 73 MPs stood down in 1997 (approximately 24 % of the sample of Conservative MPs). In contrast, less than 15 % of Labour MPs (38 of 261) retired before the 1997 election.

As the details relating to the number and type of controversies are discussed in the previous chapter, it is only necessary to quickly review the broad figures. In the 1992-1997 general election period, 158 MPs had a controversy; 122 of whom were Conservative MPs (almost 38 % of Conservative MPs) and approximately 12 % (31) of Labour MPs were embroiled in a controversy. These values are important in analysing the relationship between having had a controversy and the decision to stand down from parliament. Out of the 158 MPs who had a controversy, 39 of them retired before the 1997 election, a not unsubstantial 24.7 % of the group. If one further dissects the data, 25.4 % of Conservative MPs who had a controversy stood down (31 MPs) while approximately 16 % (five of 31) Labour MPs did the same. The fact that nearly one quarter of MPs who retired in 1997 had a controversy indicates that the relationship is one that merits investigation.

Table 4.2 contains data on MPs who retired from parliament heading into the 2010 election. It reports figures for those who stood down generally, those who had a controversy and those who were implicated in the expenses scandal. The sample includes 618 MPs of all parties, of which 191 are Conservative MPs and 340 are Labour MPs.

Table 4.2: MP retirement 2010

	All Parties (N=618)	Conservative (N=191)	Labour (N=340)
Retired	145 (23.5 %)	36 (18.9 %)	98 (28.8 %)
Implicated Expenses	418 (67.6 %)	133 (69.6 %)	235 (69.1 %)
Implicated Expenses and Retired	105 (25.1 %)	29 (21.8 %)	69 (29.4 %)
Controversy	126 (20.4 %)	29 (15.2 %)	81 (23.8 %)
Controversy and Retired	29 (23 %)	4 (13.8 %)	22 (27.2 %)

The number of retirees increased from 1997 to 2010, rising to approximately 24 % of MPs in the sample (145 of 618 MPs). The five per cent growth in the percentage of MPs who decided to stand down in 2010 from 1997 is sizable. Nearly 29 % of Labour MPs decided to step down and almost 19 % of Conservative MPs. As the percentage of MPs overall who retired in 2010 grew from 1997 it is logical that the percentages would also increase on a per party basis.

As in the analysis of the retirees heading into the 1997 election, there are interesting connections between controversy and retirement for the 2010 election. 126 MPs (approximately 20 %) had a controversy between the 2005 and 2010 general elections. The majority of those controversies involved Labour MPs with approximately 24 % (81 MPs) of party members drawing coverage for their actions. Fifteen per cent of Conservative MPs (29) also had a controversy. The link between having had a controversy and choosing to retire in 2010 is strongest for Labour MPs: approximately 27 % of Labour members who had a controversy stood down. The effect was far less strong for Conservative MPs with only four retiring, comprising 13.8 % of the sample. These figures are further discussed in the results section for the 2010 election.

The expenses scandal allows for additional examination of the relationship between salacious behaviour and retirement from parliament. Well over half of MPs in the sample (67.6 %) were implicated in the scandal, either through coverage in *The Telegraph*, by being asked to repay money in the Legg Report, or both. The percentages of implicated MPs are nearly identical between the main two parties with 69.6 % of Conservative MPs and 69.1 % of Labour MPs embroiled in the scandal. What is more interesting is that approximately 25 % of MPs who were implicated in the expenses scandal retired before the 2010 election. Out of those implicated, 21.8 % of Conservative MPs (29 MPs) and 29.4 % of Labour MPs (69) stood down. These are by no means insignificant figures thereby suggesting the existence of some interesting trends in the relationship between having

been implicated in the expenses scandal and retiring from parliament (see also Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming).

4.5 Controversy and vote share

The relationship between political controversy and an individual MP's vote share is the foundation for the second dependent variable of this study. The correlation between the two will be explored in depth in the results section, but presented below are some general trends in the vote share differential between the 1992 and 1997 and 2005 and 2010 general elections. Table 4.3 presents the average vote share differential for MPs across all parties and is also split by Labour and Conservative parties, as well as the change in vote share for those who had a controversy between May 1992 and May 1997.

Table 4.3: Vote share trends 1997

	All Parties (N=627)	Conservative (N=323)	Labour (N=261)
Average Vote Share Differential	-2.184	-12.245	9.032
Controversy	-7.620	-12.264	7.735

The average vote share loss across all MPs in the HOC was approximately two percentage points in the 1997 election. When one looks at changes in vote share split by party, we see that it was Conservative MPs pushing that result with an average loss of approximately 12 percentage points and over a nine point rise in Labour MPs vote shares. This is unsurprising as the figures capture the national vote swing towards Labour. In terms of MPs who had a controversy, the vote share values mark the same general trend. Conservative MPs who had a controversy barely suffered an additional vote share loss as compared to the party average (they lost an additional 0.02 percentage points). Interestingly, the effect is more marked for Labour MPs who had a controversy who, on average, still saw a boost in their vote share, but by 1.3 percentage points less than the party average.

Table 4.4 presents the same information as in Table 4.3 but for the 2010 election.

Table 4.4: Vote share trends 2010

	All Parties (N=618)	Conservative (N=191)	Labour (N=340)
Average Vote Share Differential	-1.236	4.041	-5.139
Controversy	-2.755	2.730	-5.807

The values are much reduced from 1997. As the Labour party was in power, its MPs lost more than their Conservative opposition, averaging an approximate five per cent loss. Conservative MPs on average gained more than four points from their 2005 vote share. The trend from the 1997 election continues when the change in vote share is analysed in light of those MPs who had a controversy during the general election period. Across all parties, MPs who had a controversy lost nearly three percentage points from their previous vote. When split by party, Conservative MPs with a controversy lost 1.3 percentage points as compared with the Conservative average. Labour MPs who had a controversy lost an additional 0.7 points from the average. While this has been a very crude look at the relationship between changes in vote share and controversy it highlights some relationships worthy of further examination.

4.6 Background characteristics

Traditional analyses of parliamentary politics in the UK ascribe very little power to individual MPs in terms of their ability to control their own political fates. This work takes issue with this reading of politics in Britain by offering, instead, that an MP's capacity to inform the course of his or her career may be underestimated. While the strict administrative control of political parties in Britain is difficult to refute and evident in the power exercised by whips and party officials, personal choices and behaviours directly inform the process. This way of thinking has largely been lumped under the banner of the connection between public officials and the electorate, which forms the

personal vote. As discussed previously, the personal vote refers to the individual connection between a politician and his or her constituency (Cain, et al., 1987). It is nurtured through constituency-level activities like door-to-door campaigning and visits, frequent surgeries and creating a general sense of closeness between an official and the electorate. Although these activities fall under the remit of those that would boost the strength of the relationship between officials and the public, the personal vote can also have detrimental effects come election day if a representative has misbehaved and/or let voters down in some way.

To go one step further, this paper offers that beyond behaviours that may or may not endear an MP to the electorate and/or the party, background characteristics could affect his or her career. This mode of thinking has been used in previous research dedicated to unearthing predictors of ministerial tenure. In their 2007 paper, Berlinski, Dewan and Dowding argue that individual MP characteristics such as educational background, gender and ministerial experience are statistically significant determinants of length of ministerial tenure. There has also been extensive research in the MP recruitment literature that points to certain backgrounds (namely urban middle class) that lead to a career in politics (Cairney, 2007; Norris, 1997). While this work is not charged with exactly the same set of research questions, the introduction of background characteristics as explanatory variables in explaining the effect of controversy on an MP's decision to stand down and his or her vote share may proffer some interesting findings. It follows that there are certain actions that a politician may take which affect his or her political career and there may also be characteristics that impact his or her future.

Is there a prototypical politician? Is he or she a character who possesses a host of qualities that make him or her more apt to go into politics and to succeed? Dal Bó, Dal Bó and Snyder (2009) report that in the US Congress politics flows through certain people's veins, literally. The authors demonstrate a causal relationship between a longer tenure in power and the chances of a person

starting (or continuing) a political dynasty. As they put it, “[i]n politics, power begets power” (Dal Bó et al., 2009: 115). In the UK, political dynasties are not nearly as prevalent and strong as in the US. While there are important and long-lasting political families on the British political scene there are far fewer than in America. That said, a type of political dynasty exists in Britain in that the Conservative party had, and continues to have but less so today, a strong reputation for putting up candidates educated at Oxford or Cambridge Universities (Oxbridge) and whose profession before entering parliament was a mainstream high-earning professional or what Mellors (1978: 58) calls the “communicating professions”, including law, education and journalism. This is often thought to be a result of old-fashioned cronyism – friends helping friends who belong to the same clubs, frequent the same restaurants and events.

All of this is not to say that there is a lack of cronyism on the Left. The Labour party has given plenty of evidence (especially of late) to suggest that it is made up of an old boys’ network itself. All in all, it comes down to the fact that politics attracts, generally speaking, a high achieving type who has succeeded in their pursuits beforehand and views a political career as the summation of their accomplishments in whichever realm they are entering from. This is perhaps not a bad thing in that a crucial aspect of representative democracy is that the electorate wishes to be represented by someone who they feel is better qualified to work in politics than they are. It follows that the public elects the best, brightest, and most capable to office, but it is important to consider that when standing for a political party a candidate requires support from the party. In this way, party officials are consistently monitoring the calibre and qualities that their candidates possess thereby leaving ample opportunity to hand-select people of a certain type.

While the dependent variables chosen for this study aim to look at issues of political accountability in British politics, it is an interesting corollary to investigate whether electoral choices and intra-party sanctioning mechanisms disproportionately affect different types. In turn, the

explanatory variables for this study (beyond political controversy which is the main independent variable) were chosen for their potential link to a politician whose appeal is likely to curry favour in some circumstances and not in others. The most standard individual level control employed was an MP's age at the time of the election (May 1997 and May 2010). This is especially important in regressions estimating an MP's decision to retire from parliament as, inevitably, age will be a factor in many politicians' decisions. Age was coded as a continuous variable.

While gender is also a fairly standard control it has important pertinence, especially to the 1997 election. There was a push to bring more women to the political arena. In pursuit of this cause, all-women shortlists for Labour candidates in key constituencies were used and Tony Blair spent a tremendous amount of time talking up the importance of creating better gender balance in the HOC. For this reason, it is plausible that gender could carry more explanatory weight in this particular election than usual.

As previously discussed and an extension of the thinking employed in the MP recruitment literature, I researched which MPs had attended Oxbridge for either their undergraduate or graduate degrees. This information was collected from a group of sources including *Vacher's Quarterly* and *UK Who's Who* with findings confirmed on an MP's personal website when available. In addition, I created a binary variable for those MPs whose previous career was as a lawyer (solicitor or barrister) (1) or other (0). Since educational background has been found to be a factor in predicting length of ministerial career in the UK (Berlinski et al., 2007) there is reason to think that past career could also have an effect on political careers (Cairney, 2007). As touched on above, having been a lawyer before entering parliament is a transition stereotypically associated with the transition to politics. Though a lawyer is not the only profession in this category, it is, however, one strongly associated with the move into politics and should, therefore, capture any potential effect of a change in support/backlash against a certain set of personal characteristics of MPs.

I also researched whether or not an MP made it to government rank or on to the frontbench during the 1992–1997 and 2005–2010 general election period.²³ I envisaged this information to be important because higher-ranking MPs garner proportionately higher levels of media attention. Further, as achieving higher office is the goal of most, if not all MPs, their career trajectory might be different. For example, a government minister may weather a controversy better than a backbench MP due to the support of the government or, conversely, be punished more harshly for having tarnished the reputation of the party.

There is a wide range of constituency-level effects that could influence an MP's decision to retire and affect his/her vote share at an election. Factors that may have an effect include, though are not limited to, a constituency's level of employment, whether the constituency is urban or rural, constituents' attention to the news/politics, literacy rates and socio-economic factors to name a few. However, this work emphasises a constituency's level of marginality as the most important constituency-level effect.

The marginality of a seat is logically important in explaining why certain MPs had larger vote share losses in the 1997 and 2010 elections and/or lost their seats. Where they began, in terms of vote share compared with their opponents, may have put them in a precarious position from the get-go. Further, there are three ways that I hypothesise marginality affecting whether an MP retires or not. Marginality could affect whether an MP stands down – if the race was close in the previous election it may not be worth fighting an election only to lose, whether an MP had a controversy or not. Marginality could also have an effect on whether an MP has a controversy in the first place. Higher

²³ MPs were considered to be members of the government if they were a minister in the cabinet, minister of state, junior minister (parliamentary undersecretary), parliamentary private secretary or a whip. An MP was considered a member of the frontbench team if they were in the shadow cabinet, a shadow minister, an opposition spokesman or opposition whip. Information on positions held in the Government for the 1992-1997 period was found in parliamentary documents from the HOC. Data on members of the frontbench in the 1992-1997 general election period was found in *UK's Who's Who* and checked against other online sources. The comparable information for the 2005-2010 period was sourced from the *UK's Who's Who* and checked against Wikipedia by Christian Glangschneid and Carmen Valero Gomez, doctoral candidates at the University of Vienna, to whom I am very grateful for their hard work.

levels of scrutiny in marginal seats may naturally lead to greater numbers of controversies being observed or the anticipated scrutiny may reduce an MP's likelihood to misbehave. In contrast, MPs in safe seats may take on a more indifferent attitude towards their behaviour because they are unlikely to lose. Lastly, there could be an interaction effect between marginality and controversy thereby indicating that if you are an MP in a marginal seat and have a controversy you would then retire. For these reasons, marginality is treated as the prominent constituency-level variable that could affect the dependent variables in this research.

To compute the level of marginality of each of the constituencies, I track the difference in vote share between the winning and second place candidates.²⁴ In order to better interpret the results, I define marginal seats like Norris (2010) as those where the incumbent has a ten per cent majority or less. Converting marginality from a continuous to binary variable will allow for a more clear-cut analysis of the effect of marginality especially in terms of the interaction with political controversy.

4.7 Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics of important variables in the dataset proffer added insight into the questions at hand. Table 4.5 contains information on the number of MPs who served during the 1992–1997 period who were lawyers before entering parliament, their gender, whether they went to Oxford or Cambridge and their average age. It also contains the standard deviations for these variables. This information is presented for all MPs in the sample (N=627) as well as split by party for Labour (N=261) and Conservative MPs (N=323).

²⁴ For the constituencies that did not undergo any boundary changes, I used the actual marginality value from the 1992 and 2005 elections. For those constituencies where there were changes, I used Rallings and Thrasher's notional marginality values (Rallings and Thrasher, 1995; 2007).

Table 4.5: Descriptive statistics 1997

	Lawyer	Male	Age	Oxbridge
All MPs				
Mean	87 (13.9 %)	573 (91.4 %)	54.5	200 (31.9 %)
Std. deviation	0.346	0.281	9.017	0.466
<i>N</i>	627	627	627	627
Conservative MPs				
Mean	60 (18.6 %)	305 (94.4 %)	54.5	143 (44.3 %)
Std. deviation	0.390	0.229	9.178	0.497
<i>N</i>	323	323	323	323
Labour MPs				
Mean	19 (7.3 %)	227 (87 %)	54.5	52 (19.9 %)
Std. deviation	0.260	0.337	8.759	0.400
<i>N</i>	261	261	261	261

The average age of MPs at the time of the 1997 election was 54.5 years old. This figure makes sense for two reasons. First, as most people go into politics as a second career, politicians are likely to be middle-aged while in office (or on their way out of office), having amassed experience in other fields beforehand. Secondly, and supporting the previous point, the 1997 general election is a particularly important election as it saw the end of the Conservative party's 18-year tenure in government. It follows that many MPs would have been elected at the beginning of Margaret Thatcher's term in their late-30s, having spent some time in other professions, and then made their way into the political arena, therefore leaving them in their mid-50s around the time of the party's departure from office.

As previously discussed, it is impossible to predict exactly who will and will not go into politics. There are a whole host of characters from varying backgrounds that MPs emerge from. That said, there are certain characteristics that a large percentage of MPs possess, such as having been a lawyer before entering parliament. Almost 14 % of all MPs who served between 1992 and 1997 were

lawyers before entering parliament, the majority of whom were members of the Conservative party with approximately 19 % of Conservative MPs considered falling into that category. The number of Labour MPs who were trained as lawyers was far less with only 19 MPs, making up 7.3 % of the Labour sample and three per cent of the total population of MPs.

It is unsurprising that the majority of MPs in the sample were male, comprising over 90 % of members. There was a higher percentage of male MPs in the Conservative party as compared to Labour with 94.4 % versus 87 % in the 1992–1997 Parliament. These figures are in keeping with the tradition of male-dominated parliaments. The high figures were a motivation for the move towards female MP recruitment and controversial all-women shortlists.

A substantial 32 % (200) of all MPs attended Oxford or Cambridge for either undergraduate or graduate school with over 71 % (143 MPs) of that group belonging to the Conservative party. A lower percentage, though by no means a small amount, of Labour MPs attended Oxford or Cambridge (roughly 20 % (52) of 261 MPs). These figures are in keeping with the general perception of Conservative party members having attended a select few schools and, on the whole, emerging from similar backgrounds. Though 20 % of Labour MPs having attended Oxbridge is not an insignificant amount there was clearly less diversity of educational backgrounds within the Conservative party.

Table 4.6 contains descriptive statistics for MPs serving between 2005 and 2010. It mirrors the variables analysed for 1997. In all independent variable categories except for the age of MPs there were substantial differences in the data. The average age of MPs remained roughly the same (though with a slight increase) at 55.3 years of age. Labour MPs were over two years older than Conservative MPs on average, but the difference does not connote anything substantive and the logic employed previously concerning politics as a second career still holds.

Table 4.6: Descriptive statistics 2010

	Lawyer	Male	Age	Oxbridge
All MPS				
Mean	69 (11.2 %)	497 (80.4 %)	55.3	169 (27.4 %)
Std. deviation	0.315	0.397	9.178	0.446
<i>N</i>	618	618	618	618
Conservative MPs				
Mean	39 (20.4 %)	174 (91.1 %)	54.3	83 (43.5 %)
Std. deviation	0.404	0.285	9.276	0.497
<i>N</i>	191	191	191	191
Labour MPs				
Mean	24 (7.1 %)	246 (72.4 %)	56.8	65 (19.1 %)
Std. deviation	0.257	0.448	8.592	0.394
<i>N</i>	340	340	340	340

The percentage of MPs across all parties who were lawyers before taking on a career in politics dropped from the 1992–1997 period to just over 11 % of the sample. There were significantly more Conservative MPs who had been lawyers than Labour MPs with 20.4 % versus an approximate seven per cent. These figures are in keeping with the ratio from the 1997 election.

There was a decrease, overall, in the percentage of MPs in the HOC who had been to Oxbridge for university or a graduate degree moving from 31.9 % to 27.4 % of members. The percentage of Conservative MPs who attended Oxbridge stayed roughly the same as in 1992–1997 with approximately 43.5 % as opposed to 44.3 %. The change in the composition of Labour’s MPs in that respect was also relatively insignificant with 19.1 % instead of an approximate 20 %. While the percentage of MPs within the main two parties who attended Oxbridge stayed relatively the same, the decrease in the percentage of MPs who attended Oxbridge overall marks an interesting shift in the educational backgrounds of members of the HOC. Further, of those who did attend Oxbridge, 12.5 % were members of alternative parties (not Conservative or Labour) as opposed to 2.5 % in 1997. These

trends highlight a change that coincides with the dramatic rise in power of the third largest party, the Liberal Democrats, and while it is going too far to draw a direct correlation between the two factors, it is certainly interesting to see the concentration of MPs who attended Oxbridge dissipate at the same time that the significance of alternative political parties rises.

The shift in the gender composition of the HOC between 1997 and 2010 is perhaps the most interesting result. It is evident that Labour's push for a more female parliament was successful. While the overall percentage of male Conservative MPs shifted down from over 94 % to just over 91 %, the Labour party went from being 87 % male in 1992 to 72.4 % in 2005. This approximate 15 % decrease in the number of male MPs overall shows, more importantly, an over 100 % increase in the number of female Labour MPs in the HOC. This change under New Labour managed to decrease the percentage of men serving in parliament from 91.4 % in 1992 to 80.4 % in 2005, a significant ten per cent decrease.

The independent variables discussed above are germane to this research for their potential ability to add to the story that this research aims to tell. The effect of controversy is not the only important variable for analysis, but also the possible impact of an MP's background characteristics on his or her electoral fate and future career path. Including these variables may expose trends not measured in such a way before and elucidate a clearer picture of the political landscape in 1997 and 2010.

4.8 Predicting political scandal

Is there something about an MP that makes them more prone to be embroiled in controversies? The independent variables selected for this study indicate that it potentially does matter who an MP is personally in predicting electoral outcomes. An MP's gender, age, whether they were in government/on the frontbench and other background characteristics are all factors that could

contribute to explaining major career choices such as retirement and deciphering changes in vote share, as described above. In this way, the individual characteristics of an MP can help in predicting what will happen to him or her or what decisions he or she will make. It seems a logical extension that perhaps there would be a set of variables that would explain behaviour as opposed to outcomes – can it be predicted who will or will not be involved in a controversy?

Initially, I set out to determine not only what role controversy played in the electorate's voting behaviour, but if there were characteristics about a person that made them more prone to behave in a certain way. I thought that the same background characteristics employed to predict the decision to stand down and explain changes in vote share would also serve as predictors of behaviour in MPs. After running a series of binary logistic regressions with political controversy as the dependent variable (coded 1 if the MP had a controversy and 0 if not) and the gambit of independent variables as my predictors, I found no significant results for the 2010 election and party affiliation (Conservative specifically) as the only substantive explanatory variable for the 1997 election. This finding merely reiterates the fact that Conservative MPs had more controversies than their Labour opposition during the 1992–1997 general election period and little more. It is for this reason that regressions that use controversy as the dependent variable have been excluded from this work, but I feel that consideration of the plausibility of using it as a dependent variable should be discussed as part of my methodology.

The next chapter will examine the effect of political controversy on an MP's decision to retire and vote share in the 1997 election through regression analysis. It also presents descriptive statistics that highlight the relationship between specific types of controversy and MP retirement patterns as well as the change in an MP's vote share.

Chapter 5: Results – The 1997 General Election

5.1 Setting the stage

Our daily papers and newsfeeds are fully stocked with tales of misbehaviour and bad deeds. It is a logical extension of this heavy media coverage that scandals and political controversies matter to the electorate. If they didn't matter, there is little chance that they would continue to garner such high levels of news attention. Further, one can deduce that the public is interested in these stories as they are driving the news cycle. When a story becomes dull to the public it drops off the scene. New stories take over the front pages of newspapers when the public wants them – papers have to keep readership up.

This research is tangentially concerned with the tenuous relationship between news coverage and public interest. Its primary focus is on the supposition that it is near impossible for the phenomenon of widespread controversy reporting to have no effect on the perpetrators of these offenses. Attention always has an effect. While politics is, no doubt, a vastly different industry from all others, this work addresses whether the well-known public relations colloquialism that 'all press is good press' holds true for politicians. More specifically, political controversies must affect the lives of the representatives who are responsible. The chances of a politician's poor behaviour sitting on the pages of the major broadsheets and him or her walking away unscathed seems, at least on the surface, slim to none.

The last two chapters were spent investigating the important variables, dependent and independent, which make an assessment of the impact of political controversy on MP vote shares and its role in an MP's decision to retire from parliament plausible. The dependent variable choices, as explained, were selected with the intention of refocusing analyses of British parliamentary politics on to the individual and away from traditional readings wherein party politics dominates in full.

Research on the growing importance of valence issues on UK vote choice as well as further exploration into the electorate's awareness of individual MP's actions is suggestive that this is an opportune time for this type of study. Additionally, its outcome will shed light on the current media practice of focusing on controversy and politicians' misbehaviour. If controversy is unimportant to the electorate in that it has no substantial effect on its vote choice or place in an MP's assessment of his or her political career prospects then the public is, in some way, faking their disdain. It is the main virtue of democracy that "people can throw the rascals out" (Schumpeter, 1942) and so it is an important undertaking to look into whether or not the "rascals" do get thrown out and, if they do, with what level of veracity.

5.2 The 1997 General Election

This results section focuses on the 1997 General Election, Labour's landslide victory and the end of 18 years of Conservative government. Tony Blair's charisma is given tremendous credit for its impact on the outcome, standing in stark contrast to the less effusive and drier John Major, a figure who the public had, seemingly, become thoroughly detached from. Major's failings in properly managing the UK economy as PM, combined with some generally agreed upon poor decisions during his time as Chancellor under Margaret Thatcher, were a major factor in voter assessments of him and the Conservative party. This, combined with a desire for the overhaul of the education system, put Blair in prime position to take office. Additionally, the term sleaze is one that haunted the Major administration. A number of high profile scandals severely tainted the Conservative party. As demonstrated in Farrell, McAllister and Studlar's 1998 study, sleaze was a damaging factor in the performance of the Conservative candidates in the 1997 election, though not necessarily the game changer one might have thought. In order to further examine the extent to which scandal, and controversy more generally, affected individual politicians in 1997 I will first look at its role in an MP's decision to retire from parliament.

5.3 Why retire?

The myriad of reasons which inform a politician's decision to retire from office have been discussed in the previous chapter. The two key factors that this work is able to address are his or her age and involvement in a controversy during the course of the 1992–1997 Parliament. Employment opportunities outside of the HOC would certainly be of interest, but are not included in this research. This work first employs binary logistic regression and a dichotomous measure of if an MP retired (1) or sought re-election (0) as the dependent variable. I will first analyse the impact of political controversy on an MP's decision to retire across MPs from all parties and then split by Labour and Conservative.

As an introduction to the relationship between controversy and retirement, Figure 5.1 graphically represents the effect for all MPs in the HOC considered in aggregate. The x-axis is divided between those who did not have a controversy and those who did. The y-axis scale is the proportion of MPs who retired. Figure 5.1 demonstrates the large differential between the proportion of MPs, from any party, who were embroiled in a controversy during the 1992 and 1997 general elections standing down versus those who were not. On average, the probability of an MP without a controversy retiring was approximately 16.5 %. This stands in stark contrast to the likelihood that an MP who had a controversy retired in 1997 – an increase to nearly 25 % probability of standing down. The eight per cent differential in the odds of standing down between MPs with and without a controversy during the general elections period suggests that controversy is a potentially important determinant in an MP's retirement calculation.

Figure 5.2 represents the relationship between controversy and retirement for Conservative MPs only. Its axes delineate the same information as in Figure 5.1. The general trend expressed in Figure 5.1 continues when Conservative MPs are considered in isolation. However, the difference in the probability of standing down for Conservative MPs who did not have a controversy versus those

who did is far less pronounced than when MPs across all parties are considered together. The probability of a Conservative MP without a controversy standing down in 1997 was 21 %, 4.5 % more likely than the whole of the controversy-free MP population of the HOC considered in aggregate. There was a 25.5 % chance that Conservative MPs who had a controversy between the 1992 and 1997 general elections would stand down, representing a 4.5 % increase in the odds of a Conservative MP retiring in 1997 if he or she had a controversy as compared to their peers.

Figure 5.1: Standing down 1997

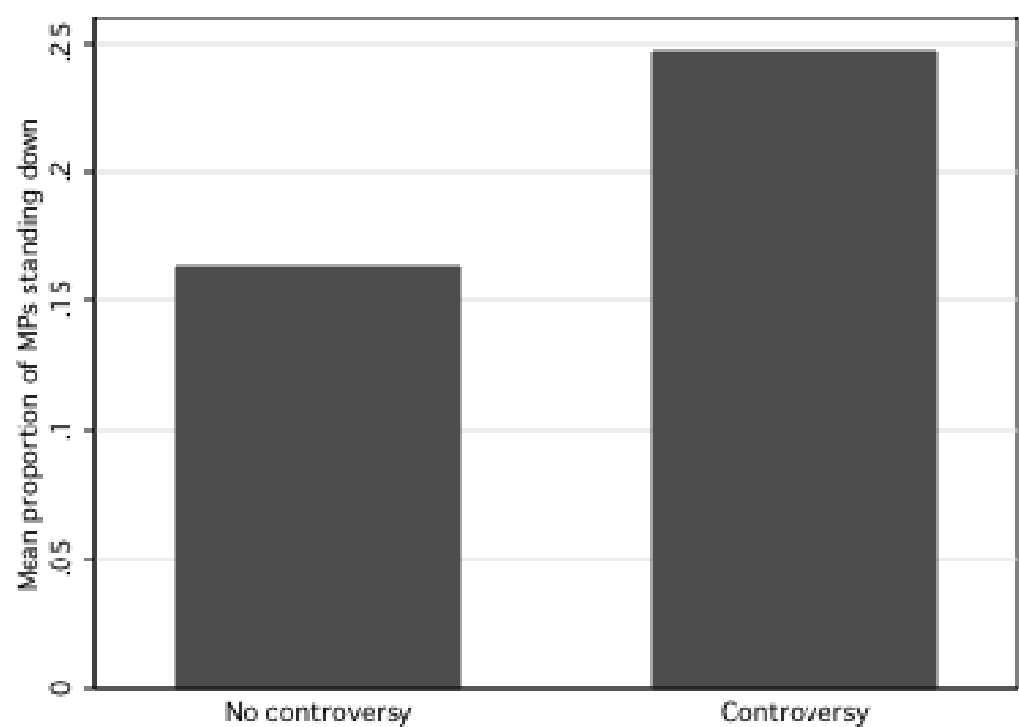


Figure 5.3 depicts the same relationship as those described above, but for Labour MPs only. It shows that the likelihood of retiring for Labour MPs was far lower than their Conservative colleagues. Labour MPs with no controversy had an approximate 14 % probability of standing down and those who had a controversy were only slightly more likely to retire with a 17 % probability. The three per cent differentiation is slightly less than the differential for Conservative MPs.

Figure 5.2: Standing down – Conservative MPs 1997

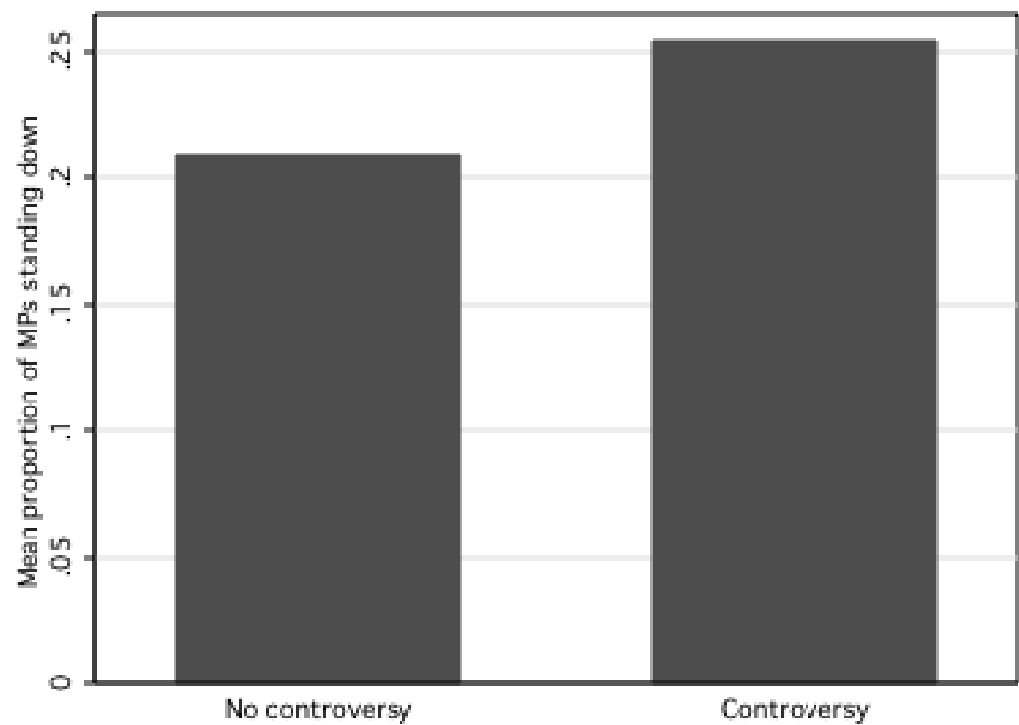
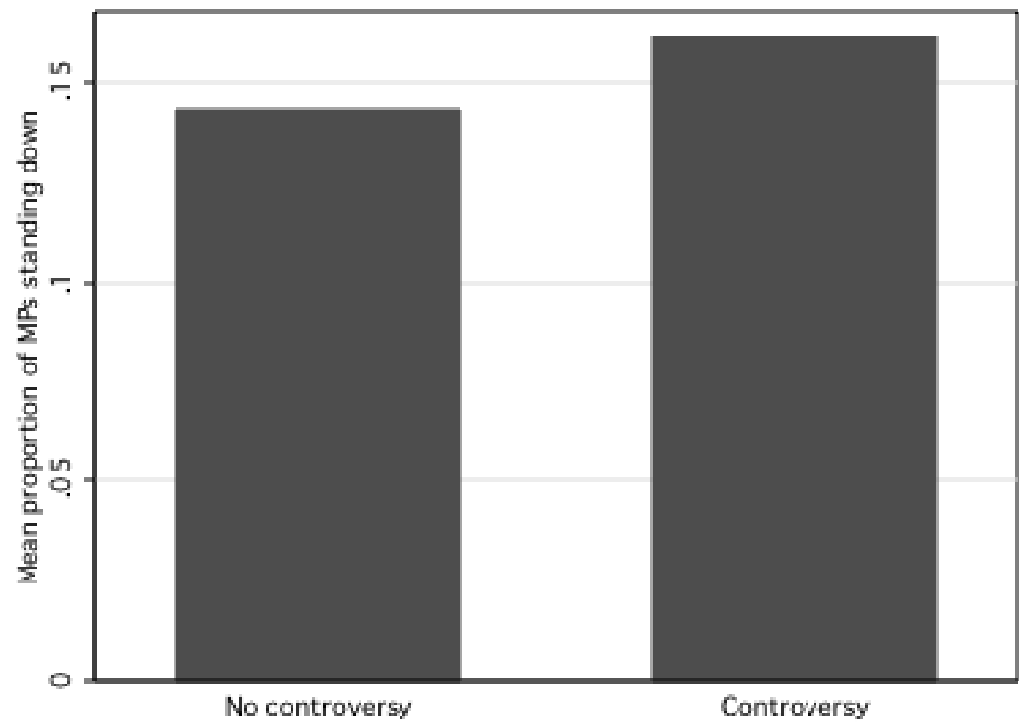


Figure 5.3: Standing down – Labour MPs 1997



Though a decreased ratio, Figure 5.3 also indicates potential for a link between the decision to retire and having had a controversy for Labour MPs.

5.4 Results: binary logistic regression – retirement 1997

Table 5.1a contains beta coefficients and robust standard errors for the independent variables used to predict the likelihood of MPs standing down at the 1997 election. Table 5.1b contains the predicted change values for selected models in Table 5.1a. Model 1 Table 5.1a highlights the significant effect across all MPs (N=627) (holding all other variables at their mean) of having had a controversy on the probability that an MP retired from parliament in 1997.²⁵ The significant effect of controversy, which equates to an increase of just over ten per cent in the probability of an MP standing down, holds across all estimations for MPs considered in aggregate. The controversy variable was highly significant, at the one per cent level. The statistical significance of the controversy variable is interesting as it raises three important issues. The first is that there is a relationship between the controversy and the probability of standing down – a connection that has been discussed before, but never demonstrated in such a way previously. The second and third points are linked and hard to disentangle.

These points relate to the question of who makes the decision to retire from parliament for an MP. There are two obvious answers, the first being the MP him or herself (option 1) and the second being the party/party management (option 2). These two options are what make the significance of controversy important – if an MP is embroiled in a controversy is there an approximate ten per cent increase in the probability of retiring due to option 1 or option 2?²⁶ One would think that an MP would feel some sense of responsibility if he or she had done something truly wrong and would

²⁵ In all analyses of logit regressions, marginal effects values are interpreted holding all other variables at their mean.

²⁶ This does not preclude other factors influencing an MP's decision to retire. It is meant to focus on the two main ways that a controversy may affect whether or not an MP stands down from parliament.

Table 5.1a: Standing down – all constituencies 1997

	All MPs			Conservative MPs			Labour MPs		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Controversy	0.89** (0.30)	0.92** (0.31)	0.92** (0.34)	0.83** (0.33)	0.87** (0.33)	0.96** (0.38)	-0.14 (0.85)	-0.08 (0.86)	0.18 (0.88)
In Government	-0.03 (0.32)	-0.02 (0.32)	-0.02 (0.32)	-0.40 (0.35)	-0.38 (0.34)	-0.38 (0.34)			
Frontbench	-0.84* (0.43)	-0.75+ (0.44)	-0.75+ (0.44)				-0.48 (0.51)	-0.62 (0.57)	-0.65 (0.56)
Age	0.16*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.23*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.04)
Marginality		0.27 (0.32)	0.28 (0.38)		0.56 (0.38)	0.72 (0.52)		-0.54 (0.84)	-0.28 (0.79)
Gender		1.28* (0.57)	1.28* (0.57)		1.60* (0.83)	1.62* (0.81)		0.91 (0.93)	1.03 (0.89)
Lawyer		0.17 (0.39)	0.17 (0.39)		-0.18 (0.45)	-0.17 (0.45)		0.78 (0.68)	0.93 (0.70)
Oxbridge		-0.13 (0.27)	-0.13 (0.27)		0.06 (0.32)	0.06 (0.32)		-1.10 (0.57)	-1.10 (0.57)
Controversy*Marginality			-0.01 (0.65)			-0.33 (0.72)			-1.59 (2.67)
Intercept	-10.97*** (1.11)	-12.55*** (1.34)	-12.55*** (1.34)	-9.23*** (1.40)	-11.42*** (1.78)	-11.51*** (1.77)	-15.30*** (2.36)	-16.98*** (2.93)	-17.46*** (2.83)
N	627	627	627	323	323	323	261	261	261
Pseudo-R ²	0.26	0.27	0.27	0.21	0.23	0.23	0.38	0.41	0.41

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Table 5.1b: Predicted change

	All MPs	Conservative MPs	Labour MPs
	Model 2	Model 5	Model 8
Controversy	0.102	0.120	-0.002
In Government	-0.002	-0.050	
Frontbench	-0.057		-0.022
Age	0.015	0.019	0.009
Marginality	0.026	0.078	-0.018
Gender	0.079	0.124	0.025
Lawyer	0.016	-0.022	0.040
Oxbridge	-0.012	0.007	-0.031

factor this assessment into the decision to retire. In reality, even if an MP does recognise fault or a strong aversion to party policy, for example, re-standing decisions are not always within their control. If an MP were given the green light to run again it is plausible to assume that he or she would be hard-pressed to give up that opportunity (barring considerations of age and, perhaps, outside job options). If this strain of thinking is correct, then it is all the more interesting that political parties might be ten per cent more likely to push an MP mired in controversy to retire than those who are free of controversy. This finding then raises the question of whether or not political parties remove MPs who have had controversies as a result of some moral compass or because they feel that voters will use elections as an accountability mechanism to sanction them if given the chance. In this way, political parties have the opportunity to sanction their members. The significant increase in the probability of an MP who had a public controversy and stood down indicates that this is a hypothesis worth considering.

Three other variables are statistically significant predictors of an MP's decision to retire: age, gender and whether a Labour MP was on the frontbench during the 1992–1997 Parliament. As mentioned previously, the statistical significance of the age variable is important and, at the same time, not entirely shocking. The marginal effect of age, holding all other variables at their mean, is to increase the probability of retiring by 1.5 %. The age variable was highly significant in Models 1, 2 and 3 at the 0.001 level. It is plausible to think that this percentage increase would be higher as MPs pass the HOC average (hovering around the mid-50s) and since most would only retire at the end of a parliament, and not during, unless there were extenuating circumstances. The age variable denotes that an MP five years older than another is 7.5 % more likely to retire. This figure is much more substantial and supports the importance of the age variable in an MP's decision to stand down.

As for the impact of an MP's gender on his or her decision to retire, the probability of standing down in 1997 increased for male MPs relative to their female counterparts by approximately

eight per cent, significant at the five per cent level. This finding is not necessarily surprising for explaining retirement when one considers how many more male MPs there were serving in the HOC between 1992 and 1997, but it is still notable.

Having served on the Labour frontbench significantly decreased the probability of retiring before the 1997 election. The effect equates to a 5.7 % reduction in the likelihood of standing down. Though only significant at the ten per cent level, this result indicates that Labour MPs in higher positions of power were less likely to stand down than their backbench colleagues. This adds evidence to the hypothesis that MPs who are more integral to the party, as demonstrated by their promotion, are more likely to stay on and run again at the next election. Although not statistically significant, Conservative MPs who were members of the Government were also less likely to stand down, though only marginally (less than one per cent). An analysis of Conservative and Labour MPs in isolation will either confirm this hypothesis or highlight that the variables are acting merely as a proxy for party affiliation.

None of the personal characteristics that I envisaged having an effect on an MP's career, such as whether or not they went to Oxbridge or were a lawyer before entering parliament, had a statistically significant impact on an MP's decision to retire in Model 3. Oxbridge graduates were just over one per cent less likely to retire than those without a degree or a degree from another institution. MPs who practised law before entering parliament were more likely to retire than those who started in other professions by 1.6 %.

The interaction effect between controversy and marginality is not statistically significant (coefficient value -0.01, Model 3 Table 5.1a). In order to understand the effect of controversy on constituencies depending on whether or not they are marginal it is important to calculate the effect of controversy in marginal constituencies (Brambor et al., 2005) as the regression tells us the effect in non-marginal constituencies is 0.92 and significant at the 1 % level. The effect in marginal

constituencies is 0.91 (Controversy + Controversy*Marginality) and is not statistically significant. This demonstrates that the effect of controversy is only significant in non-marginal constituencies while the difference in the effect between marginal and non-marginal constituencies is not significant.

It should also be noted that the variable denoting whether or not a Liberal Democrat MP served on the frontbench during the 1992–1997 Parliament was dropped from the regression as it perfectly predicted the 0 category outcome, i.e. standing for re-election. As there were only 20 Liberal Democrat MPs in the sample and experts predicted landslide gains for the Labour party, standing in 1997 for incumbents from other parties was a logical choice.

The next series of models present estimations for the effect of political controversy on whether or not an MP retires from parliament with specific reference to MPs from the Conservative party (Models 4, 5 and 6) and Labour party (Model 7, 8 and 9). The other independent variables are the same. I will first focus on Conservative MPs.

The main independent variable of interest, controversy, remains strongly significant when Conservative MPs are analysed in isolation. This holds true across Models 4, 5 and 6. A Conservative MP who had a controversy between the 1992 and 1997 general elections had an increased chance of retiring by 12 % and increases to over 13 % in Model 6. Significant at the one per cent level across the board, this result suggests that controversy was a strong predictor of the probability that a Conservative MP would stand down in 1997.

While the statistical significance of the variable did not increase from Models 1, 2 and 3, the magnitude of the effect grew. The growth in the probability of an MP stepping down if he or she had a controversy points to it as a substantive factor in a Conservative MP's career calculation and also suggests that the Conservative party itself may have played a role in this result. As previous research demonstrates, the PM and high-level officials are deeply involved in the candidate selection process.

If having had a controversy increases the odds of retirement by over 13 % (Model 6) it does not seem implausible to consider that the party may have been filtering out many of those marred by the controversies of the period.

As in Models 1-3, a Conservative MP's age was a significant predictor of whether or not he or she retired before the 1997 election. It remains highly significant at the 0.001 per cent level. The coefficient value is similar to the estimation for MPs of all parties. Likewise, the model denotes that for every year older a Conservative MP gets, the probability of retiring increases by approximately 1.9 %. This is slightly higher than the average for MPs of all parties (1.5 %), but not a notable difference. As in the case above, it is expected that age would be an integral aspect of a retirement decision.

Models 5 and 6 of Table 5.1a show that gender was also a significant explanatory variable in predicting the probability that a Conservative MP would retire in 1997. Significant at the five per cent level, the variable denotes that male MPs were 12.4 % more likely than female MPs to stand down. This is over a four per cent increase in the magnitude of the effect for MPs from all parties. It does not provide that much information as one would expect men to be the predominant retirees, especially from the heavily male-dominated Conservative party but it is, nevertheless, an interesting finding. Further, it sets a nice precedent for the drive to recruit more women into parliament.

Models 7, 8 and 9 of Table 5.1a predict no effect of political controversy on the probability of a Labour MP retiring from parliament in 1997. The controversy variable has a negative coefficient in Models 7 and 8 that becomes positive in Model 9, but only connotes a less than one per cent increase in the odds of retiring for Labour MPs. While the age variable remains significant as in the other estimations, the magnitude of its effect is less. Model 8 demonstrates that the marginal effect of age is to increase the probability of retiring by just less than one per cent. The magnitude of the result is small, but its statistical significance denotes an importance to the overall question.

Political controversy's insignificance as an explanatory variable for Labour MPs could be representative of the predicted large national vote swing away from the Conservatives. It seems unlikely that the electorate would want to commend controversy-prone MPs for their behaviour (excluding cases of policy disagreement and gaffes perhaps), but this appears to be very much a tale of partisan politics in Britain. Though one might not expect the magnitude of the effect to be near that of Conservative MPs, it is a bit surprising that there is no statistical significance to the variable at all. It is plausible that Labour MPs who had a controversy were confident enough in their chances of re-election to forge ahead, a likely consequence of the predicted landslide. In this way, one can envisage a Conservative MP mired in controversy deciding to step down or being forced out as his or her chances were already quite slim on the basis of a predicted swing towards Labour. At the same time, a Labour MP who has misbehaved might have thought that the odds were with the party, so why not stand?

Overall, this series of regressions demonstrates an important and significant role of political controversy in the difficult calculation to retire from parliament for MPs when considered in aggregate and for Conservative MPs when considered in isolation. Controversy was not a significant predictor of Labour MPs' decisions to stand down. An MP's age, as expected, was highly significant in all estimations. All other independent variables that were considered were insignificant with the exception of gender, which perhaps reflects the lopsided ratio of male to female MPs serving in the 1992–1997 Parliament.

5.5 Alternative estimations

Some attention has already been paid to the effects of boundary changes on the research questions addressed in this work. To check the robustness of the results I also measured whether or not the results hold when only looking at constituencies that did not undergo any boundary changes as one would expect the impact of political controversy on standing down to be strongest in areas where the MP was set to face the same voters again in 1997 as in 1992.

Model 1 Table 5.2a depicts the insignificant relationship between controversy and standing down for MPs (across all parties) when only looking at constituencies that did not undergo any boundary changes between 1992 and 1997. Table 5.2b shows the predicted change for both Models 1 and 2 in Table 5.2a. With a much reduced N of 169, Labour MPs who were on the frontbench were 8.3 % less likely to retire than their backbench counterparts (Model 1). Age continued to be an important predictor of the decision to stand down, increasing the probability of retiring by just under one per cent for every year older an MP gets.

Table 5.2a: Standing down – no boundary change constituencies 1997

	All MPs	Conservative MPs
	Model 1	Model 2
Controversy	-1.56 (1.12)	-0.59 (1.23)
In Government	-0.01 (0.67)	-0.81 (0.80)
Frontbench	-2.13* (1.02)	
Age	0.14 *** (0.04)	0.11* (0.06)
Marginality	-1.03 (0.86)	0.44 (1.25)
Lawyer	-0.61 (0.99)	-1.87 (1.44)
Oxbridge	-0.15 (0.53)	0.98 (0.70)
Controversy*Marginality	3.53* (1.59)	0.86 (1.66)
Intercept	-8.90*** (2.19)	-7.42* (3.65)
N	169	67
Pseudo-R ²	0.28	0.29

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Table 5.2b: Predicted change

	All MPs	Consevative MPs
	Model 1	Model 2
Controversy	-0.065	-0.046
In Government	-0.001	-0.073
Frontbench	-0.083	
Age	0.008	0.009
Marginality	-0.052	0.038
Lawyer	-0.030	-0.123
Oxbridge	-0.008	0.090

The interaction between controversy and marginality is statistically significant at the five per cent level (Model 1). In non-marginal constituencies the effect of controversy is -1.56, negative but not significant. In marginal constituencies the effect of controversy is 1.97 and not statistically significant, though very close to the ten per cent level. Thus while the effect of controversy in both marginal and non-marginal seats is not significant, there is a significant difference between the effects in either type of seat.

Model 2 presents the effect of political controversy on the probability of standing down for Conservative MPs sitting in constituencies whose boundaries were left unaltered. As in Model 1 Table 5.2a, the political controversy variable is not statistically significant. Age remains significant, but only at the five per cent level and denotes a less than one per cent increase in the probability of retiring for every year older a Conservative MP gets. Gender was dropped from both Models 1 and 2 as it predicted standing again perfectly in both estimations and led to a loss of observations. The estimation for Labour MPs is not presented as the majority of variables, including political controversy, were dropped from the equation for lack of variability in outcomes.

Overall, Table 5.2a demonstrates that the effect of political controversy on the decision to stand down is not robust when the sample size is reduced to focus only on constituencies where there

have been no boundary changes. Whereas one could envisage that the relationship would be strongest in constituencies where an MP was going to have to face exactly the same electorate, this is evidently not the case. It follows that the results displayed in Table 5.1a are strong and significant, but do not hold to this alternative specification.

5.6 Does type matter?

It is a natural extension of the research presented above to consider whether or not the effect of controversy is as strong for specific types. Some of the most interesting work on the topic so far has considered whether the type of scandal matters vis-à-vis its effect on the electoral outcome (Farrell, et al., 1998; Peters and Welch, 1980; Welch and Hibbing, 1997). Do financial scandals hurt representatives more than sexual scandals? Are instances of moral missteps judged better or worse than those that reflect an inability to competently do one's job?

Due to the fact that this research looks at data on all of the controversies a particular MP was embroiled in during the 1992–1997 general election period, there are cases where an MP had more than one type of controversy. For instance, they might have had a sexual and financial scandal or a policy and performance controversy. It follows that in an assessment of controversy's impact, it is difficult to tell whether it is the financial scandal that sealed an MP's fate or an illicit affair, for example.

To give some indication of what the relationship between specific types of controversy and retirement in 1997 was, I have calculated the percentages of MPs (across all parties and for Conservative MPs) who retired with reference to the five categories of controversy.²⁷

²⁷ I also modelled the effect of specific types of controversy on the probability of standing down for MPs across all parties and Conservative MPs as a subgroup. Having had a sex scandal significantly increased the probability of standing down for all MPs considered in aggregate and for Conservative MPs. Additionally, those Conservative MPs that had an 'other' controversy were more likely to retire. There was no statistically significant effect for any of the other types.

Table 5.3: Type of controversy and retirement

All MPs (N=627)	Type total	Total retired	Percent retired
Sexual Scandal	16	4	25 %
Financial Scandal	47	12	25.5 %
Policy Controversy	30	6	20 %
Performance Controversy	47	8	17 %
Other Controversy	45	11	24.4 %
Conservative MPs (N=323)	Type total	Total retired	Percent retired
Sexual Scandal	15	4	26.7 %
Financial Scandal	43	11	25.6 %
Policy Controversy	25	4	16 %
Performance Controversy	39	7	17.9 %
Other Controversy	21	7	33.3 %

Table 5.3 highlights strong relationships between certain types of controversy and retirement rates. Across all MPs (N=627), over 25 % of those MPs that had a financial scandal retired before the 1997 election. A substantial 25 % that had a sex scandal and 20 % that had a policy controversy left the HOC as well, while 17 % of those MPs with a performance controversy retired in 1997 and more than 24 % of MPs embroiled in a difficult to categorise type of controversy (my ‘other’ category) stood down.

As Conservative MPs were involved in the majority of the controversies of the period and it was a significant explanatory variable in their likelihood to retire, I have presented the same information for Conservative MPs (N=323) alone in the bottom half of Table 5.3. Having had a sexual scandal continues to have a large correlation to retirement in 1997 with 26.7 % of Conservative MPs with a sexual scandal standing down. Despite this significant relationship, it was those Conservative MPs who had an ‘other’ type of scandal who retired in the highest numbers. A third (33.3 %) of this group ended their political careers in the run-up to the 1997 election. Those MPs embroiled in the other three types – finance, policy or performance – also retired in large numbers. Just over a quarter (25.6 %) of MPs with a financial scandal stood down, 16 % of those

involved in a policy controversy and almost 18 % of those whose performance had been challenged left the Commons.

Unfortunately, the fact that 33.3 % of Conservative MPs involved in an ‘other’ type of controversy retired does not tell us much about the kinds of controversies that made MPs retire. What Table 5.3 does highlight that is substantive though, is that those MPs (in aggregate) who had financial scandals retired in the highest numbers (besides my ‘other’ category) and that Conservative MPs with sexual scandals had the highest percentage rate of retirement. This is perhaps contrary to prior expectations, as I would have thought that performance controversies would have correlated with higher levels of retirement as there is reason to believe that politicians are judged on their ability to perform their jobs well as their personal behaviour may be too difficult to base decisions upon. This theory still holds since a retirement decision is distinctly different from an election where electorate input is involved. However, I would still have expected larger percentages (especially in comparison to the other categories) of MPs whose performance was questioned to have stood down in 1997. Though it is not possible to pinpoint exactly which type of controversy led to a retirement (and age is always a crucial and unwavering factor), Table 5.3 does at least present the trends for the groups where controversy mattered for retirement in 1997.

5.7 For those who decided to stand again, what next? Controversy and vote share

Are politicians held individually accountable for their behaviour? Or do they flourish and die alongside their party? The relationship between individual members of parliament and his or her political party has been the subject of study for decades. The next series of regressions tackle this tenuous relationship by estimating the effect of political controversy on an MP’s vote share in the 1997 General Election. I use the vote share differential between what percentage an MP earned in 1992 and 1997 as the dependent variable. As previously discussed, difference in vote share is an apt

dependent variable as it eliminates the need to use previous vote share (i.e. 1992 percentage of the vote earned) as an independent variable. The significance of previous vote share in predicting the next election's vote often eliminates the effect of other explanatory variables and the model is better suited to addressing the impact of political scandal with the difference in vote share as the dependent variable. It also controls for the effect of time invariant constituency effects on vote share.

Figure 5.4 depicts the differences in vote share between 1992 and 1997 for MPs split according to whether or not they had a controversy in the general election period.

Figure 5.4: Change in vote share 1992–1997

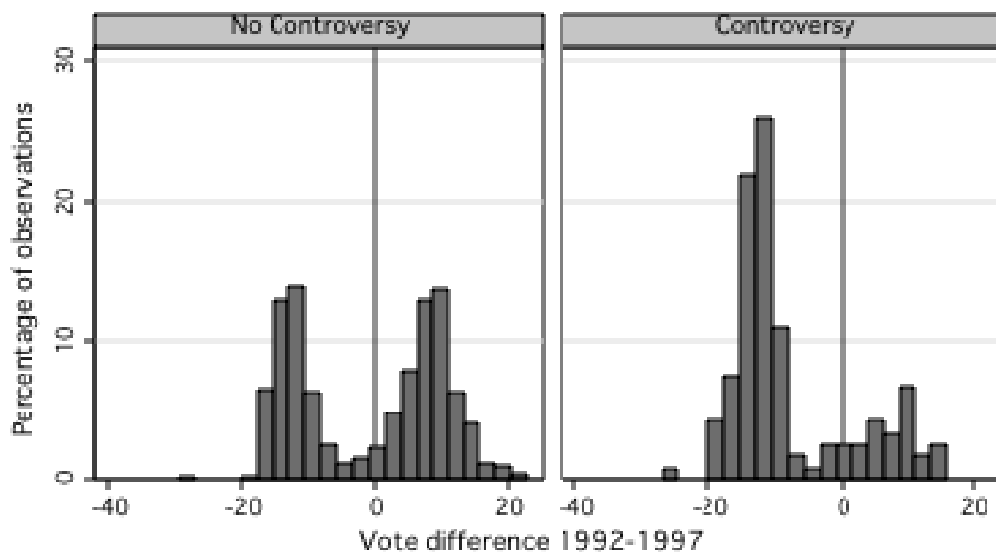


Figure 5.4 demonstrates the trend that, though perhaps not overwhelming, MPs who had controversies suffered a greater reduction in their vote share than those who did not. From this figure, it appears that there were many more MPs with no controversy whose vote share went up as opposed to those who had a controversy. Figure 5.4 highlights the cluster of MPs who were controversy free and saw an increase in their vote share of between five and 15 percentage points. Far fewer MPs in

the group who had a controversy gained points at the polls in 1997, with anyone who gained 16 points or above belonging to the controversy-free group. While it would be unfair to say that MPs who had a controversy were the only ones whose vote shares went down from 1992 to 1997, the large spike in that group who lost around ten per cent of their vote share indicates that the public may be actively punishing those MPs.

Figure 5.4 serves as a nice introduction to the statistical models employed to address the effect of controversy on vote share. As previously discussed, there is potential here to assess whether voters hold their MPs electorally accountable for their behaviour. In turn, I estimate a series of regressions addressing the same question as Figures 5.4, all of which utilise the difference in vote share as the dependent variable and measure the impact of controversy for all MPs and the Conservative and Labour parties specifically.

5.8 Results: vote share and political controversy 1997

While Figure 5.4 provides a rough representation of the relationship between political controversy and vote share in the 1997 General Election, the trends are further elucidated through the following regressions. Initially, the dichotomous independent controversy variable is regressed against the difference in vote share dependent variable for the entire sample of MPs who sat and ran again in 1997 in a constituency that did not undergo any boundary changes (N=145). As discussed previously, the approach of using only those constituencies where the boundaries were unaltered allows for the most accurate measurement of the effect of controversy as it ensures that the same set of people were voting in 1992 as in 1997.

As shown in Table 5.4 Model 1, controversy had a negative and significant impact on an MP's vote share in 1997 when MPs from all parties are considered in aggregate and controversy is the only independent variable used in the estimation. The effect is highly significant.

Table 5.4: Vote share – no boundary change constituencies 1997

	All MPs			Conservative MPs			Labour MPs		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Controversy	-8.57*** (1.95)	-3.84* (1.58)	-1.52 (1.75)	-0.09 (0.79)	-0.11 (0.78)	1.15 (0.77)	-1.44 (1.30)	-1.34 (1.30)	-0.34 (1.24)
In Government		-14.48*** (1.34)	-16.16*** (1.51)		-1.47+ (0.74)	-2.23** (0.79)			
Frontbench		4.59*** (1.37)	3.87** (1.26)					1.54+ (0.88)	-1.23 (0.84)
Lib Dem Frontbench		0.29 (1.68)	-0.75 (2.31)						
Marginality			2.18 (1.44)			1.57+ (0.87)			3.09** (1.04)
Age			-0.25** (0.78)			-0.06 (0.04)			-0.12** (0.04)
Gender			-0.82 (2.05)			4.15*** (1.05)			-0.08 (1.23)
Lawyer			-2.91+ (1.69)			0.01 (0.73)			-0.49 (0.78)
Oxbridge			0.87 (1.28)			0.43 (0.68)			0.75 (0.80)
Controversy*Marginality			-8.80* (4.39)			-1.56 (1.47)			
Intercept	1.51 (0.93)	3.14** (1.17)	16.92*** (4.37)	-12.27*** (0.44)	-11.28*** (0.62)	-12.67*** (2.98)	8.31*** (0.46)	8.98*** (0.52)	13.96*** (2.45)
N	145	145	145	55	55	55	79	79	79
R ²	0.11	0.56	0.64	0.00	0.07	0.42	0.01	0.05	0.28

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

The model predicts that having had a controversy during the 1992–1997 Parliament cost individual MPs over eight and a half percentage points, by no means a small amount.

However, it appears that the effect of political controversy is not what is principally explaining the difference in vote shares for MPs between 1992 and 1997. In Model 2 of Table 5.4, the effect of controversy is estimated in conjunction with variables delineating whether or not an MP served in the Conservative Government, on the Labour frontbench or on the Liberal Democrat frontbench during the 1992–1997 election period. The magnitude of the coefficient of the controversy variable (-3.84) is much reduced from Model 1 and the level of statistical significance drops to the five per cent level.

For Conservative and Labour MPs, whether or not they served in the higher ranks of their party was key to explaining their vote share. Conservative MPs who were members of the Government lost an additional 14.5 percentage points of their vote share compared to other Conservative MPs who sat on the backbenches. Contrastingly, Labour MPs who served on the frontbenches received a boost in their vote share, gaining over 4.5 percentage points as compared to those on their backbenches. The effect did not hold for members of the Liberal Democrats whose frontbench members only received a 0.29 point increase in their vote. The results for members of the Conservative Government and those on the Labour frontbench are statistically significant at the 0.001 level.

Table 5.4 Model 3 presents the most complete picture of the personal characteristics considered to affect MPs' vote share. The primary independent variable of interest, controversy, is shown to be insignificant in non-marginal constituencies (coefficient value of -1.52) in contrast to Models 1 and 2. However, the interaction effect between having had a controversy and sitting in a marginal constituency was statistically significant at the five per cent level. This indicates that MPs that had a controversy and sat in a marginal seat lost an additional 8.14 percentage points. The size of

the effect is substantive and the significance of this interaction effect highlights the value of using marginality as a constituency-level effect in these models.

As in Model 2, whether or not an MP held a position on either the frontbench (Labour MPs) or in Government (Conservative MPs) had a significant impact on their vote share in 1997. The sign of the coefficients were opposing, with those who served on the frontbench gaining an increase of just under four points and those who were members of the Government suffering losses in their vote share of over 16 %. Both variables are highly significant. I believe that these findings are linked to the fact that these MPs were inevitably more 'high profile' than the average MP. This would therefore lead to increased media attention as well as these MPs representing the party in a more official capacity and in turn potentially being viewed as a target for voters in the Conservative's case or figures worthy of extra support in Labour's case. Conservative MPs who were in Government were *de facto* more connected to the power apparatus and could be punished more harshly than their backbench colleagues. An additional loss of over 16 % for Conservative MPs is a large amount, but does not seem that out of place when one considers the trend expressed in Figure 5.4. Further, it must also be considered that this regression has a sample of only 145 MPs and the result could be a function of particularly virulent cases of vote share losses in that group. These variables could also be picking up the effect of party affiliation, with Conservative MPs suffering major losses and Labour MPs seeing boosts in their vote share in the 1997 election.

Two personal characteristics produced a significant result in the final estimation (Table 5.4 Model 3). The first was whether or not an MP's profession before entering parliament was as a lawyer (barrister or solicitor). The coefficient was significant at the ten per cent level. It predicts that those MPs who were lawyers in their previous career lost 2.91 additional points at the polls in 1997 compared to their colleagues who entered parliament from other professions. This is certainly worth noting as it is quite a substantial value in terms of vote share, especially considering that there were

so few other variables with significant results. That said, it is difficult to put forward a persuasive argument as to why this would be the case, especially when MPs are considered in aggregate. My original thinking was that there might be a backlash against a certain stereotypical MP (Oxbridge educated, etc.) who would be punished more harshly, but this effect is difficult to disentangle when looking at MPs across all parties and is perhaps a more useful explanatory variable in the analysis of MPs from the Conservative and Labour parties separately. Age was also statistically significant and predicts that for every year older an MP gets, he or she loses 0.25 percentage points off their vote share.

Models 4, 5 and 6 present the coefficients and robust standard errors for the regressions explaining changes in vote share for Conservative MPs between 1992 and 1997. In all estimations, controversy has a statistically insignificant effect on Conservative MPs' vote share in 1997. When considered as the only explanatory variable (Model 4), the sign of the coefficient is negative, but with only a very small value of -0.09 percentage points. Where there are instances of individual seat races being decided by such small amounts, under one tenth of a percentage point is not incredibly decisive. Further, the chances of controversy being an important part of a Conservative MP's 1997 General Election tale are diminished by the large vote swing to Labour. When one considers the data presented in Figure 5.4, which highlights the large vote losses that occurred in the 1997 election, a loss of less than one percentage point is not likely to make a tremendous difference.

The lack of impact of political controversy on Conservative MPs in 1997 is further elucidated in Models 5 and 6 when the coefficient value actually becomes positive in Model 6. The controversy variable has corresponding coefficients of -0.11 in Model 5 and 1.15 in Model 6. As in the analysis of Model 4, these are not values that are likely to affect an election outcome. Overall, the coefficients of the controversy variable demonstrate that individual Conservative MPs were not held electorally

accountable for this particular representation of their behaviour in 1997. Other issues were more salient.

Though the values are much reduced from the estimations presented in Models 1, 2 and 3, which contain data on MPs from all parties, Conservative MPs who were members of the Government during the 1992–1997 election period were punished slightly more harshly than their backbench counterparts. The magnitude of the drop is substantial, from over 16 percentage points in Model 3 of Table 5.4 to approximately 2.25 percentage points in Model 6 (coefficient value of -2.23). The ‘in Government’ variable is significant at the one per cent level in Model 6. The decrease in the value of this variable is clearly a party effect where the ‘in Government’ variable in Models 2 and 3 captures the general swing against Conservative MPs, which is shown to be far less substantive in Models 5 and 6 as Conservative MPs are considered in isolation. It is still, however, interesting that higher ranking members of the Government lost additional points off their vote.

The gender of Conservative MPs is a highly statistically significant explanatory variable. Conservative male MPs, on average, gained just over four percentage points more than female MPs who re-stood in 1997. If one considers the disparity between male and female MPs in the HOC overall, and certainly within the Conservative party, this finding makes sense.

Models 7, 8 and 9 focus on Labour MPs specifically. The controversy variable is statistically insignificant in all estimations. The sign of the coefficient is actually negative in each model, which is not necessarily what one would expect as Labour MPs saw such a substantial increase in their vote share. Further, the values of the coefficients are larger (more negative) than those for Conservative MPs. However, their statistical insignificance renders them perhaps paradoxical, but not entirely important for this story. Marginality is a significant explanatory variable (at the one per cent level),

with an associated coefficient of 3.09. This indicates that Labour MPs in marginal seats received an increase in their vote compared to those in ‘safe seats’.²⁸

Table 5.4 showcases political controversy as a generally insignificant factor in explaining vote shares in the 1997 election as the results did not hold in an analysis of Conservative and Labour MPs on their own. Using only those constituencies that did not undergo any boundary changes in the 1995 redistricting action raises questions of external validity because we cannot know much beyond the (small) sample. It follows that I have therefore also estimated the regressions using the entire sample of MPs who stood again in 1997 using notional vote shares and marginalities (Rallings and Thrasher, 1995).

As in the estimations in Table 5.4, political controversy is a statistically significant explanatory variable when considering MPs from all parties in aggregate. Table 5.5 Model 1 demonstrates that MPs with a controversy lost almost 1.7 percentage points more than those MPs who did not have a controversy. The impact of having been in the Government is significant. Members of the Conservative Government lost over 13 points and Labour frontbenchers gained over seven extra points more than backbenchers. Whether the constituency was marginal or not is also significant and suggests that MPs in marginal seats saw an extra boost on polling day in their vote share. An MP’s age and whether or not he or she was a lawyer before entering parliament both prove to be statistically significant explanatory variables; the model shows that lawyers suffered more than those who came from other professions and that older MPs lost a fractional amount off their vote.

²⁸ The interaction between controversy and marginality was dropped from Model 9.

Table 5.5: Vote share – all constituencies 1997

	All MPs	Conservative MPs	Labour MPs
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Controversy	-1.68* (0.80)	0.23 (0.49)	-1.26 (0.85)
In Government	-13.13*** (0.82)	-0.77 (0.48)	
Frontbench	7.24*** (0.83)		-0.78 (0.56)
Lib Dem Frontbench	-0.11 (1.55)		
Marginality	2.90** (1.00)	1.95*** (0.59)	2.85*** (0.71)
Age	-0.25*** (0.05)	-0.04+ (0.02)	-0.09** (0.03)
Gender	-0.88 (1.26)	1.66+ (0.90)	-0.72 (0.83)
Lawyer	-2.56** (0.87)	-0.41 (0.54)	-0.31 (0.85)
Oxbridge	-0.50 (0.77)	0.16 (0.38)	0.53 (0.62)
Controversy*Marginality	-1.68 (2.03)	-0.55 (1.06)	2.69 (1.99)
Intercept	14.58*** (2.84)	-11.66*** (1.75)	13.87*** (1.89)
N	511	250	223
R ²	0.55	0.09	0.18

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Models 2 and 3 of Table 5.5 are largely reflective of the data presented for Conservative and Labour MPs who stood in constituencies with no boundary changes (Table 5.4). Political controversy is an insignificant explanatory variable in both models. Whether a constituency was marginal or not continues to be significant for both Conservative and Labour MPs, highlighting that it is an important constituency-level effect in these estimations. Nevertheless, the analyses presented here indicate, overall, that the difference in vote shares for MPs in the 1997 election cannot be explained by the personal behaviours and characteristics of the MPs who ran for re-election.

5.9 Vote share breakdown by type

Even though controversy is an insignificant factor in explaining MP vote shares generally, there might be interesting trends in the actual vote share values dependent upon what type of controversy an MP was involved in. In Table 5.6, I present the average vote differential between the 1992 and 1997 election for MPs (of any party) who had each of the five types of controversy in the top panel and for Conservative MPs specifically in the bottom panel.²⁹ As previously discussed, there are MPs that were involved in more than one type of controversy between the 1992 and 1997 elections and therefore may fit into more than one category.

Table 5.6: Type of controversy and vote share

All MPs (N=511)	Average Vote Difference 1992-1997
Sexual Scandal	-11.83
Financial Scandal	-11.01
Policy Controversy	-10.00
Performance Controversy	-8.22
Other Controversy	-1.16
Commons Average	-2.18
Conservative MPs (N=250)	Average Vote Difference 1992-1997
Sexual Scandal	-13.76
Financial Scandal	-12.98
Policy Controversy	-11.85
Performance Controversy	-11.71
Other Controversy	-12.22
Conservative Average	-12.25

MPs who had a sexual scandal had the largest average vote share loss, though only by approximately 0.8 more than those with a financial scandal (average loss of 11 percentage points).

²⁹ I also modelled the impact of specific types of controversy on the change in MPs' vote shares between the 1992 and 1997 elections in constituencies without boundary changes through regression analysis. I found a negative effect for the impact of having had a sex scandal on MPs considered in aggregate and for Conservative MPs and an effect for having had a policy controversy or an 'other' controversy for Conservative MPs, but with the sign of the coefficient in opposing directions. Overall, I find that there is no clear pattern to these results.

Across all parties, those charged with an ‘other’ controversy had the smallest effect on their vote, only losing 1.16 points on average. Those involved in a policy or performance controversy suffered substantially, but not as greatly as embroiled in a sexual or financial scandal losing approximately ten and eight points respectively. With the exception of those who had a controversy that fell into the ‘other’ category, the differential in vote shares for those with every other type of controversy is well above the HOC average.

The values are much more exaggerated in the bottom panel of Table 5.6 and the figures suggest that the effect controversy on the average vote share differential for all MPs is acting as a proxy for Conservative party affiliation. Conservative MPs with a sexual scandal lost more points off their vote than those who had any other type of controversy, seeing a reduction in their vote share of nearly 14 percentage points. Conservatives with a financial scandal were not far behind having lost an approximate 13 points off their vote. The values for policy, performance and ‘other’ controversies all increased from the figures in the top panel with each group losing approximately 12 percentage points from 1992 to 1997. When one looks at the Conservative average vote share differential of 12.25 it is clear that although MPs with a financial or sexual scandal suffered more than the average Conservative MP, Conservatives lost nearly the same amount across the board irrespective of the nature of their controversy. The fact that an MP who had more than one controversy would fall into more than category is important to consider, but overall the figures fall in line with the finding that political controversy did not have a significant effect on MPs’ vote share.

5.10 What does it all mean?

The data presented in this chapter highlights the fact that controversy was a significant predictor of whether or not an MP stood down in the 1997 election. It also demonstrated that whether or not an MP had a political controversy did not help to explain the change in an MP's vote share between the 1992 and 1997 elections. While we do know that many MPs that had political controversies in the 1992–1997 general election period stood again and were generally punished at the polls for reasons other than whether they had a controversy or not (Farrell, et al., 1998), one could look at the increased likelihood of standing down for MPs that had a controversy as an explanation for the lack of effect of controversy on MPs vote share. One could posit that many MPs that had a controversy retired before the election and were thereby not subject to electoral sanction. I am cautious to give this theory too much weight as it is more likely that changes in vote shares reflect other more pressing national issues, but it does deserve mention.

Therefore, the most interesting finding from the analysis of the 1997 election is that having had a controversy was a statistically significant factor in predicting the probability of an MP standing down in models analysing MPs from all parties as well as for Conservative MPs alone. The effect resulted in over a ten per cent increase in the likelihood of retiring for all MPs as a group with a notable increase evident for Conservative MPs. Controversy was a non-factor in predicting the probability that Labour MPs would stand down.

It would, of course, be difficult to support this story without acknowledging the significance of an MP's age in explaining a retirement decision. On average and across all models, for every year older an MP gets it is predicted to lead to just under a two per cent increase in the probability of retiring. While the effect is technically less than that of political controversy in magnitude, we can safely assume that it is likely to be an important factor in a retirement decision calculation. In this

way, finding an effect of age is important but not novel, whereas discovering an effect for political controversy is new territory.

The significant effect of controversy in increasing the probability of standing down implies that there may have been party pressure put on these MPs to stand down. While we can never know for certain what prompts a retirement decision, and we must consider that many MPs that ran again had controversies, the data suggests the potential for an internal sanctioning mechanism. This analysis is consonant with the ever-present significance of party politics as Labour MPs, in all analyses, were impervious to the effect of controversy. There is strong evidence of a connection between political controversy and significant increases in the probability of retiring. This points to the co-existence of a dominant party system in Britain and the traces of accountability at the same time. The same theory will be tested on the 2010 General Election in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Results – The 2010 General Election

6.1 The political landscape

The May 2010 UK General Election was a vastly different scene from the two previous Labour victories in 2001 and 2005 and, certainly, their landslide victory in 1997. Labour's majority had been steadily decreasing since 1997, bringing in 43.3 % of the vote in 1997, 40.7 % in 2001 and 35.3 % in 2005. While it was clear that a Labour victory was near impossible with Gordon Brown at the helm of the party, the prospect of a hung parliament always seemed remote even with top election analysts at the political forecasting conference at the University of Manchester in mid-March 2010 rumbling on the possibility of a hung parliament coming to fruition. Despite this, the theory that the UK would not see a majority of seats taken by one party lacked general support until the pre-election polls were in full swing in the lead up to election day. As the UK had not even come close to having a hung parliament since 1974, it seemed a far-fetched reality to most.

As we all know now, a hung parliament was more than possible, it appears that it was destined. A number of factors contributed to Labour's downfall as well as the inability of the Conservative party (the chances of the Liberal Democrats securing a majority were always beyond a stretch) to take control of the HOC on their own. Time was obviously a factor, as it always is in the UK, when there is a swing away from the party in power. Labour had been in government for 13 years and the importance of the phrase 'time for a change' should never be underestimated. While the Conservative party had managed 18 years in office before losing in 1997, 13 years is plenty of time for a political party to implement their policies and put in place long-term plans. It is also enough time for the electorate to tire of them and search for an appropriate alternative. Based on past precedent, an appropriate alternative is *almost* always the other major party.

The significance of the leaders of the three major political parties has been briefly touched upon in my review of the literature on valence issue voting in Britain. This election, more than any before it, very much came down to the personality, likeability and perceived ability to implement policies of the three party leaders. While party leaders are always a factor, as seen through the comparison of Tony Blair's charisma to John Major's serious demeanour, there was even more emphasis than in previous years. This focus was highlighted in the three televised debates where David Cameron, Gordon Brown and Nick Clegg squared off against each other in Manchester, Bristol and Birmingham. The debates, a result of a campaign masterminded by Sky News, were centred on domestic policy, international affairs and the economy respectively.

Overall, Nick Clegg and David Cameron were judged to have made the best impression in the debates. Clegg performed tremendously in the first debate, which prompted many to consider the Liberal Democrats as real contenders. The potential for this faded away as Cameron was regarded as the winner in the second and third debates. The televised debates gave a few select voters the unique opportunity to actually ask the leaders questions themselves, but also afforded the general public the chance to get to know the leaders in a different capacity than ever before. The American style format was a huge success, with high primetime ratings and an additional layer of personal connection created between the electorate and the candidates. While all three were well coached for the events, their personalities very much shone through and the general consensus was that debates were an excellent addition to the campaign process. Therefore, the debates themselves and, more importantly, the personas of the party leaders were an integral factor in the 2010 election.

The 2009–2010 parliamentary expenses scandal was another incredibly important piece of the election puzzle. While I have already touched on its key elements and will return to it in the following chapter, its significance to the election is worth mentioning again. While the scandal affected MPs of all parties, much like the 1992 House Banking Scandal in the US, the fact that it

happened under the Labour party's watch hurt their reputations more than any other. There were many standout cases from Conservative MPs (duck houses, moats, and stories of hugely expensive second homes), but it was Labour MPs who were going to jail. Taken all together, the reputations of MPs generally were significantly harmed by the scandal. It was the talk of the town, both domestically and abroad. It follows that the expenses scandal was a hot topic of the election and its impact important to consider.

The special features of the 2010 General Election discussed above make it an interesting case study for investigation of the impact of controversy on the decision to retire and individual MPs' vote shares. Furthermore, the growth in valence issue voting points to the potential for the electorate to raise the accountability bar and punish or reward MPs for their behaviour. Moreover, the expenses scandal created an air of disrepute and salaciousness around the entirety of the house, thereby potentially promoting an environment where controversies might play more of a factor in important aspects of the election. The analyses in this chapter addresses whether or not controversy was significant in explaining an MP's decision to retire from parliament and, for those who did not stand down, for its effect on vote shares.

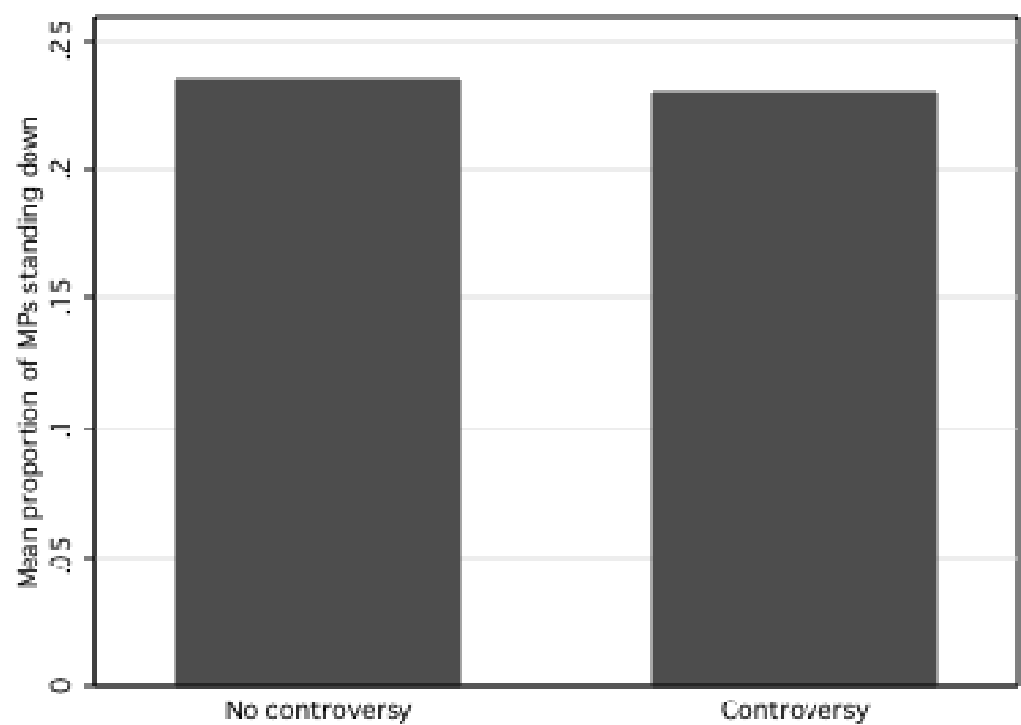
6.2 Standing down in 2010

The reasons that an MP might have considered in their difficult calculation as to whether or not they should stand down in 2010 are much the same as in 1997. Age is always a factor. Controversy is one as well, but perhaps even more than before due to the fallout from the expenses scandal and the general public's outrage. If an MP had been thinking that the 2005–2010 Parliament might be his or her last because either the private sector or another public sector job was beckoning, a peerage was on the way or they were just considering general retirement (among a host of other reasons), the fact that holding the position of MP had lost such a tremendous amount of prestige might certainly hurry along the decision. So as to address the impact of controversy on an MP's

decision to stand down in 2010, this research employs binary logistic regression and a dichotomous measure of if an MP retired (1) or sought re-election (0) as the dependent variable as I did for the 1997 case. I will look at controversy’s effect on MPs across all parties as well as consider the Labour and Conservative cases in isolation.

Figure 6.1 depicts the differentiation in the proportion of MPs standing down (across all parties) split by those who did not have a controversy versus those who did during the 2005–2010 Parliament.

Figure 6.1: Standing down 2010

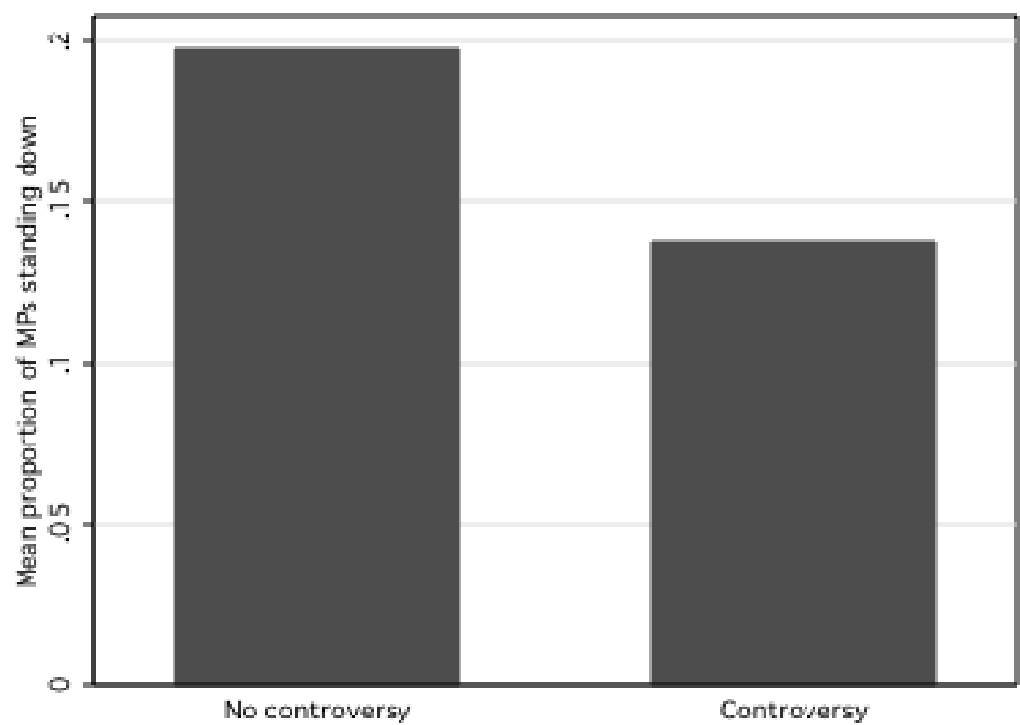


While the figure is a relatively crude representation, it does demonstrate that the results are not staggering, at least in terms of the difference between the two groups. The rate of retirement in 2010 was higher than any other election since 1945, which had obvious extenuating circumstances surrounding the ten-year lag in general elections because of issues surrounding World War II. If we

recall from the previous chapter, MPs without a controversy had a 16.5 % probability of standing down in 1997 as opposed to those with a controversy who were 24.5 % likely, an eight per cent differential. In contrast, controversy-free MPs in 2010 had an approximate 23.5 % probability of retiring and those with a controversy were actually *less* likely to retire with a probability of 23 %. The distinction between the two figures is minute, but substantive in that it indicates a vastly different scene from 1997.

Figure 6.2 represents the relationship between controversy and retirement for Conservative MPs only. It, like Figure 6.1, highlights the differentiation between the proportion of MPs retiring for those who had a controversy and those who did not.

Figure 6.2: Standing down – Conservative MPs 2010

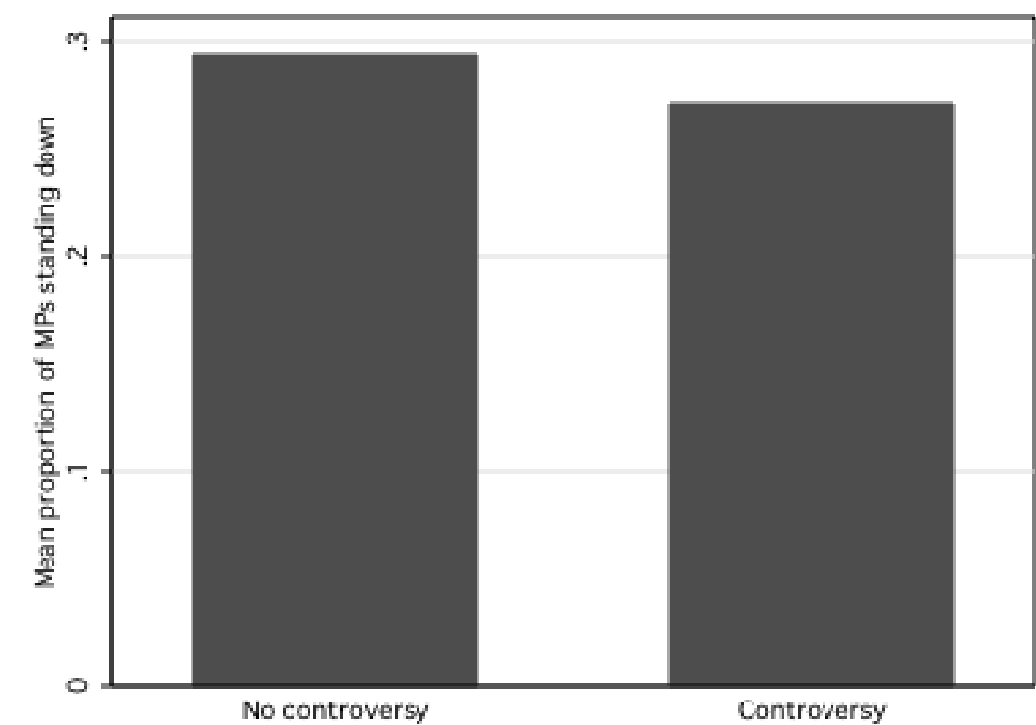


Conservative MPs’ probability of retiring in 2010 does not appear to be dependent on controversy at all. MPs who maintained a proverbial clean slate through the 2005 to 2010 Parliament had an

approximate 19.5 % probability of standing down. This is four per cent less than when MPs from all parties were considered in aggregate in Figure 6.1. As was the case in Figure 6.1, Conservative MPs who had a controversy were less likely than their untarnished peers to retire. They had only about a 13.5 % probability of standing down in 2010. The difference between the two figures is far greater than the differentiation represented in Figure 6.1.

The pattern is not too dissimilar for Labour MPs, but the magnitude of the probabilities for both categories is much increased.

Figure 6.3: Standing down – Labour MPs 2010



As was the case with Conservative MPs, those Labour MPs who had a controversy were *less* likely to retire than the rest of the party’s MPs, but not by much. Figure 6.3 shows that the probability of a Labour MP without a controversy retiring was approximately 29.5 % and the probability of a Labour MP with a controversy standing down was about 27 %. The difference between the two figures is

small (2.5 %) and demonstrates that the impact of controversy does not appear to affect the patterns of retirement for Labour MPs that greatly. What is more interesting, though, is how high the probabilities themselves are. When Figures 6.2 and 6.3 are considered together, it is clear that it is Labour MPs who are pushing the results for MPs considered in aggregate (Figure 6.1). With the proportion of MPs that retired hovering around the 30 % mark, it is apparent that Labour MPs were more likely to retire in 2010 than other parties in parliament. This is not surprising as they were in power and hit hard by the expenses scandal, but even still the rate is still notable. These patterns will be further dissected and explicated in the next section.

6.3 Results: binary logistic regression – retirement 2010

The bar graphs analysed above serve as an introduction to the relationship between controversy and retirement for the 2010 General Election. The relationship between the two categories is very different from the 1997 election as the proportion of MPs standing down is larger for those who did not have a controversy versus those who did. Table 6.1a contains beta coefficients and robust standard errors for the explanatory variables used to predict the probability of an MP standing down at the 2010 election and Table 6.1b contains the predicted change for Models 2 and 4.

Table 6.1a shows a significant increase in the probability of retiring for those MPs who had a controversy. Within constituencies that were not affected by boundary changes between 2005 and 2010, MPs who had a controversy saw over a 21 % increase in the probability of retiring before the 2010 election as compared to those who did not. Though the effect of controversy on the decision to stand down did not hold in constituencies that did not undergo boundary changes in 1997, the 2010 figure is a dramatic increase from the 1997 figures where controversy created an increase of around ten per cent in the likelihood of standing down. The effect is roughly two times larger in magnitude than that for all MPs in 1997 though with a reduction in statistical significance from the one per cent to the five per cent level.

Table 6.1a: Standing down – no boundary change constituencies 2010

	All MPs		Labour MPs	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Controversy	1.64* (0.64)	1.60* (0.81)	1.71* (0.72)	1.96* (0.93)
In Government	0.02 (0.62)	-0.16 (0.70)	0.65 (0.80)	0.59 (0.98)
Frontbench	-0.30 (1.17)	-0.51 (1.19)		
Lib Dem Frontbench	-1.79 (1.67)	-1.76 (2.03)		
Age	0.11*** (0.03)	0.11*** (0.03)	0.15** (0.05)	0.15** (0.05)
Marginality		-1.67 (1.05)		-1.47 (1.09)
Implicated Expenses		0.06 (0.62)		-1.19 (0.79)
Gender		-1.45* (0.59)		-1.49+ (0.80)
Lawyer		-0.32 (0.69)		-1.38 (0.93)
Oxbridge		1.03+ (0.61)		0.42 (0.89)
Controversy*Marginality		2.22 (1.68)		2.68 (1.79)
Intercept	-8.05*** (2.13)	-6.88*** (2.03)	-10.76*** (3.32)	-8.73* (3.45)
N	129	129	74	74
Pseudo-R ²	0.18	0.26	0.19	0.29

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Table 6.1b: Predicted change

	All MPs	Labour MPs
	Model 2	Model 4
Controversy	0.216	0.317
In Government	-0.014	0.068
Frontbench	-0.041	
Lib Dem Frontbench	-0.102	
Age	0.010	0.017
Marginality	-0.121	-0.128
Implicated Expenses	0.006	-0.164
Gender	-0.193	-0.220
Lawyer	-0.027	-0.110
Oxbridge	0.121	0.053

Age continues to be a significant explanatory variable in whether or not an MP retires, which is unsurprising but still notable. The effect of age is similar to that of estimations in the 1997 case, with an approximate one per cent increase in the likelihood of retiring for every year older an MP

gets. Gender is also a statistically significant predictor, with male MPs over 19 % less likely to retire than female MPs in 2010.

Models 3 and 4 demonstrate the strong relationship between controversy and retirement for Labour MPs (in constituencies that did not undergo boundary changes) in 2010. The data shows that for Labour MPs, having a controversy increased the probability of standing down by a staggering 31.7 %, by far the highest increase thus far. As a Labour MP gets older they are 1.7 % more likely to retire. This indicates that over the course of a parliament a Labour MP five years older than another would be, approximately, 8.5 % more likely to retire. Further, male Labour MPs are nearly 22 % less likely to retire than their female colleagues, a tremendous discrepancy in the odds of retiring between the genders. When estimating this equation for Conservative MPs the controversy, marginality, gender and variable capturing whether or not the MP had been implicated in the expenses scandal were all dropped from the regression. It follows that those results are not reported here.

What can one make of this result? It raises the same questions as it did for the 1997 analysis – when an MP retires, who is it that makes that decision? 2010 had similar circumstances to 1997 in that the party in power had been there for a while and it would be a logical time to expect a large amount of retirements. But we are still left to speculate as to whether individual MPs take the initiative to retire themselves or if political parties are removing these people from the selection pool. As we have the benefit of knowing that in the 1997 election MPs were not electorally punished for having had a controversy, parties may not have felt the need to push members out on this basis in 2010. In either case, we cannot know definitively one way or the other.

It must be noted that as in the 1997 case, the effect of controversy on retirement does not hold in all estimations. For the 2010 election, the effect largely disappears when considering the entire population of MPs, including those whose constituencies had their boundaries altered. The effect is insignificant for MPs from all parties considered in aggregate and Labour MPs. However, the

interaction term between controversy and marginality is statistically significant at just under the ten per cent level for Conservative MPs. As mentioned previously, this is the only instance of a statistically significant effect of political controversy on the decision to retire for the opposition party and there are only four cases of political controversy driving this result. With so few cases it is difficult to make general claims about the result.³⁰ Consequently, it is interesting to consider other alternative measures of the impact of political controversy on retirement in order to fully understand the relationship. More specifically, does it matter when the controversy occurred?

6.4 All in the timing

It is logical extension of this puzzle to consider whether there is a temporal effect on the relationship between controversy and retirement. One would expect that time matters in how serious or not a controversy would be in relation to an MP's decision to retire. If something creeps up at the beginning of the election period chances are that it will be considered far less serious in the lead-up to the next election. Though news outlets drudge up stories from the past, the effect cannot be expected to be quite as strong as if the controversy occurs closer to the election. In order to address this issue, I have modelled the same logistic regressions for the 2010 election only considering controversies that occurred within one calendar year of the May 2010 election. Tables 6.2a and 6.2b present the results for MPs across all parties, and Labour and Conservative MPs individually.³¹

Tables 6.2a and 6.2b demonstrate that those MPs across all parties who had a controversy within one year of the election saw over a 16 % increase in the probability of standing down. While this is a reduction in the magnitude of the effect as compared to the effect of controversy on the retirement of MPs in constituencies without any boundary changes (Table 6.1a Model 2), it still

³⁰ See Appendix A for these results.

³¹ See Appendix B for comparable results in the 1997 case. The results indicate a statistically significant effect of political controversy within a year of the election on the probability of an MP retiring. Note that models for constituencies that did not undergo boundary changes are not included as there were too few cases to successfully run the models.

reflects a significant impact. Additionally, for those MPs who served on the Conservative frontbench between 2005 and 2010 there was over a 15 % decrease in the probability of standing down compared to their backbench colleagues. Liberal Democrat frontbenchers were in a similar position with a predicted decrease of nearly 11 %. Age, as in all estimations, remains a significant predictor of the decision to retire, with just over a one per cent increase in the odds of standing down for every year older an MP gets.

The interaction effect between controversy within one year of the election and marginality is not statistically significant in Model 3 of Table 6.2a. The regression tells us that the effect of controversy within a year of the election is significant at the ten per cent level in non-marginal constituencies. The effect in marginal constituencies is also significant at the five per cent level with a coefficient value of 1.69 thereby demonstrating that the effect of controversy within a year of the election is significant in both marginal and non-marginal seats, but the difference in the effect between a marginal and non-marginal seat is not statistically significant.

When considering Labour MPs in isolation (Models 4, 5 and 6 Table 6.2a), the effect grows to over a 24 % increase in the probability of retiring when an MP had a controversy within a year of the election, retaining five per cent statistical significance across all models. As in all other estimations, the age variable was significant at the 0.001 level and denoted a 1.3 % increase in the probability of standing down as an MP grew older.

Having had a political controversy within a year of the 2010 election had no statistically significant effect on whether Conservative MPs retired in 2010. As was the case in 1997, the effect for all MPs considered in aggregate is driven by those MPs in power (Labour in 2010).

Table 6.2a: Standing down controversy under one year – all constituencies 2010

	All MPs			Labour MPs			Conservative MPs		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Controversy under 1 year	0.87* (0.38)	0.87* (0.38)	0.71+ (0.42)	0.99* (0.48)	1.09* (0.48)	1.05* (0.51)	0.22 (0.74)	0.34 (0.82)	-0.22 (1.12)
In Government	-0.24 (0.24)	-0.26 (0.25)	-0.25 (0.25)	-0.45 (0.28)	-0.44 (0.29)	-0.44 (0.29)			
Frontbench	-1.29** (0.41)	-1.33*** (0.42)	-1.31** (0.42)				-0.93+ (0.54)	-1.04+ (0.59)	-1.05+ (0.59)
Lib Dem Frontbench	-0.91+ (0.52)	-0.90+ (0.52)	-0.88+ (0.52)						
Age	0.08*** (0.14)	0.08*** (0.01)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.05)	0.15*** (0.04)
Marginality		-0.03 (0.25)	-0.10 (0.26)		0.36 (0.28)	0.35 (0.29)		-1.02+ (0.60)	-1.33+ (0.74)
Implicated Expenses		0.27 (0.23)	0.27 (0.23)		0.17 (0.27)	0.16 (0.27)		0.88 (0.57)	0.88 (0.57)
Gender		-0.22 (0.26)	-0.23 (0.26)		0.01 (0.29)	0.01 (0.29)		-1.37* (0.66)	-1.35* (0.66)
Lawyer		-0.48 (0.35)	-0.46 (0.35)		-0.51 (0.58)	-0.50 (0.58)		-0.52 (0.54)	-0.52 (0.55)
Oxbridge		0.44+ (0.24)	0.44+ (0.25)		0.40 (0.33)	0.41 (0.33)		0.62 (0.49)	0.62 (0.49)
Under 1 year*Marginality			0.98 (0.93)			0.38 (1.48)			2.27 (1.47)
Intercept	-5.73*** (0.90)	-5.78*** (0.98)	-5.80*** (0.99)	-4.60*** (1.09)	-4.97*** (1.16)	-4.97*** (1.16)	-9.74*** (2.68)	-9.43*** (2.87)	-9.19*** (2.84)
N	618	618	618	340	340	340	191	191	191
Pseudo-R ²	0.13	0.14	0.15	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.29	0.35	0.35

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Table 6.2b: Predicted change

	All MPs	Labour MPs	Conservative MPs
	Model 2	Model 5	Model 8
Controversy under 1 year	0.163	0.248	0.029
In Government	-0.039	-0.086	
Frontbench	-0.154		-0.086
Lib Dem Frontbench	-0.107		
Age	0.013	0.013	0.012
Marginality	-0.005	0.074	-0.062
Implicated Expenses	0.040	0.032	0.059
Gender	-0.034	0.001	-0.165
Lawyer	-0.065	-0.088	-0.035
Oxbridge	0.071	0.082	0.049

As we saw above, having been promoted to the Conservative frontbenches significantly decreased the probability of an MP retiring – they were over eight per cent less likely to stand down than backbenchers (Model 8 Table 6.2a). Also, as with Labour MPs, a Conservative MP's age is a significant explanatory variable in all estimations.

For the first time in any of the regressions examining which factors affect an MP's decision to retire, whether or not an MP was in a marginal seat has a statistically significant effect on whether or not a Conservative MP retired in 2010 (Model 8 Table 6.2a). Though only significant at the ten per cent level, and while one might naturally expect that those in the most marginal seats would be more likely to stand down as they only narrowly got through the election before, the results indicate that Conservative MPs in marginal seats were over six per cent less likely to retire than those whose margin of victory was over ten percentage points in 2005. This could be the result of renewed confidence that the Conservatives would win by a healthy margin in the 2010 election as Labour was predicted to lose. The result could also be affected by boundary changes in that marginalities were calculated using notional vote shares (Rallings and Thrasher 2007). While this is a commonly accepted procedure so as to avoid eliminating constituencies it does have its drawbacks.

In order to test the strength of the results presented in Table 6.2a, I now turn to the effect of political controversy within one calendar year of the election on retirement for MPs serving only in constituencies that did not undergo any boundary changes (Table 6.3a and Table 6.3b).

Table 6.3a: Standing down controversy under one year – no boundary change constituencies 2010

	All MPs	Labour MPs
	Model 1	Model 2
Controversy under 1 year	1.90* (0.84)	1.81+ (0.99)
In Government	-0.00 (0.74)	0.76 (0.83)
Frontbench	-0.89 (1.22)	
Lib Dem Frontbench	-1.02 (1.35)	
Age	0.09** (0.03)	0.13** (0.04)
Marginality	-1.07 (0.85)	-0.57 (0.95)
Implicated Expenses	0.25 (0.61)	-0.74 (0.70)
Gender	-1.09+ (0.57)	-0.89 (0.70)
Lawyer	-0.21 (0.75)	-0.96 (1.17)
Oxbridge	1.12 (0.61)	0.59 (0.82)
Intercept	-6.26** (2.12)	-7.98** (2.90)
N	129	74
Pseudo-R ²	0.23	0.22

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Table 6.3b: Predicted change

	All MPs	Labour MPs
	Model 1	Model 2
Controversy under 1 year	0.343	0.355
In Government	0.000	0.099
Frontbench	-0.074	
Lib Dem Frontbench	-0.082	
Age	0.010	0.016
Marginality	-0.097	-0.067
Implicated Expenses	0.026	-0.107
Gender	-0.151	-0.134
Lawyer	-0.021	-0.098
Oxbridge	0.152	0.088

Even after reducing the number of MPs in the sample from 618 to 129, the effect of controversy within one year of the election still holds and grows in magnitude tremendously, to over a 34 % increase in the probability of retiring when all MPs are considered in aggregate (Model 1 Table 6.3a). This is almost a 20 % increase from Model 2 of Table 6.2a, where the entire sample of MPs is considered. Moreover, the significance of the result grew from the ten per cent level to the five per cent level in the analysis of the restricted sample. This attests to the robustness of the result in that in scenarios where MPs are due to face the same electorate at the polls in 2010 as they did in 2005, the effect of political controversy (within a year of the election) still significantly affects the probability that they retire.

The same is true when one considers Labour MPs in isolation. Labour MPs who had a controversy within a year of the election and whose constituency boundaries were left unaltered saw over a 35 % increase in the probability of retiring in 2010 as compared to those Labour MPs who were controversy free or who had a controversy over a year before the election. Though only significant at the ten per cent level, the magnitude of the effect is substantial. As in other estimations, age continues to be a significant explanatory variable in explaining an MP's decision to retire, with a 1.6 % increase in the probability of standing down for every year older an MP gets. None of the other explanatory variables are significant predictors of Labour MPs' retirement. Nevertheless, the continued and significant effect of political controversy on the decision to stand down indicates it to be an important explanatory factor in this calculation. The estimation for Conservative MPs is not presented as the controversy (within a year of the election), marginality, gender and variable capturing whether an MP was implicated in the expenses scandal were dropped as in the examination of the effect of controversy (at any time) on the decision to retire.

The dramatic increase in the magnitude of the effect between having had a controversy generally and having one within a year of the election is notable. It is interesting to think about this

finding in relation to the fact that the May 2010 election produced a hung parliament, an outcome that was not widely predicted until very close to the election. Though retirement decisions are often taken well before the actual election, the 2010 election was filled with last minute changes and results. It appears that the effect of political controversy is an aspect of the election that was felt near the end. Further, the large increase in the probability of retiring, especially for Labour MPs, indicates that these late controversies may have significantly affected the probability of standing down. It is, by far, the largest effect for either the 1997 or 2010 election.

While the precise reason that an MP retires is almost impossible to uncover (even when there is a public announcement), the magnitude of the increase in the probability of an MP standing down who had a controversy within a year of the election suggests a very strong relationship. In the swarm of negative coverage surrounding the expenses scandal it seems all the more plausible that political parties would be watching their MPs' behaviour even more than usual. Further damage to the party's reputation would certainly have been frowned upon and it is not difficult to imagine a scenario in which those MPs responsible would be sanctioned. Although age is an unwavering factor in this analysis, the notion that MPs did not stand again as the result of internal sanction could be an alternative explanation worth due consideration.

I have calculated some basic descriptive statistics to capture the rate of retirement for MPs based on the five types of controversy. I did this for MPs across all parties as well as Labour MPs specifically. I look at cases of controversy that occurred within a year of the election as they had the greatest effect on the probability of an MP retiring in 2010.³²

³² As in the 1997 case, I modelled the effect of individual types of controversy on the probability of an MP standing down for MPs considered in aggregate and Labour MPs as a group. Having had a sex or finance scandal were statistically significant explanatory variables in explaining the increased likelihood of an MP standing down when considering MPs across all parties and for Labour MPs. No other types of controversy were significant predictors.

Table 6.4: Type of controversy and retirement

All MPs (N=618)	Total	Retired	Percent retired
Sexual Scandal	3	1	33 %
Financial Scandal	13	9	69.2 %
Policy Controversy	6	3	50 %
Performance Controversy	11	1	9 %
Other Controversy	13	1	7.7 %
Labour MPs (N=340)	Total	Retired	Percent retired
Sexual Scandal	0	0	0.0 %
Financial Scandal	7	7	100 %
Policy Controversy	6	3	50 %
Performance Controversy	8	1	12.5 %
Other Controversy	6	0	0.0 %

The top panel of Table 6.4 shows that MPs who had a financial scandal within a year of the election had the highest retirement rate. Nearly 70 % of the group stood down in 2010. They were ahead of the group with the second highest percentage of retirees, those who had a policy controversy. A substantive one-third of MPs who had a sex scandal retired before the 1997 election and a small percentage of those with performance or ‘other’ controversies stood down, 9 % and 7.7 % respectively. One can see a strong relationship between policy controversies, sexual and finance scandals and retirement for the 2010 case.

The bottom panel of Table 6.4 presents the same information as the top section but for Labour MPs only. Not one Labour MP was involved in a sexual scandal within a year of the 2010 election. None of those who had an ‘other’ controversy retired and only 12.5 % of Labour MPs who had a performance controversy stood down. This is still an increase from the analysis of MPs from all parties, but it is still only one in eight MPs deciding to retire. All of the MPs who had a policy controversy within a year of the election were from the Labour party. It follows that 50 % of those Labour MPs did not run again in May 2010. This is a massive increase from the 16 % of Conservative MPs who had a policy controversy in 1997 and retired. The most interesting

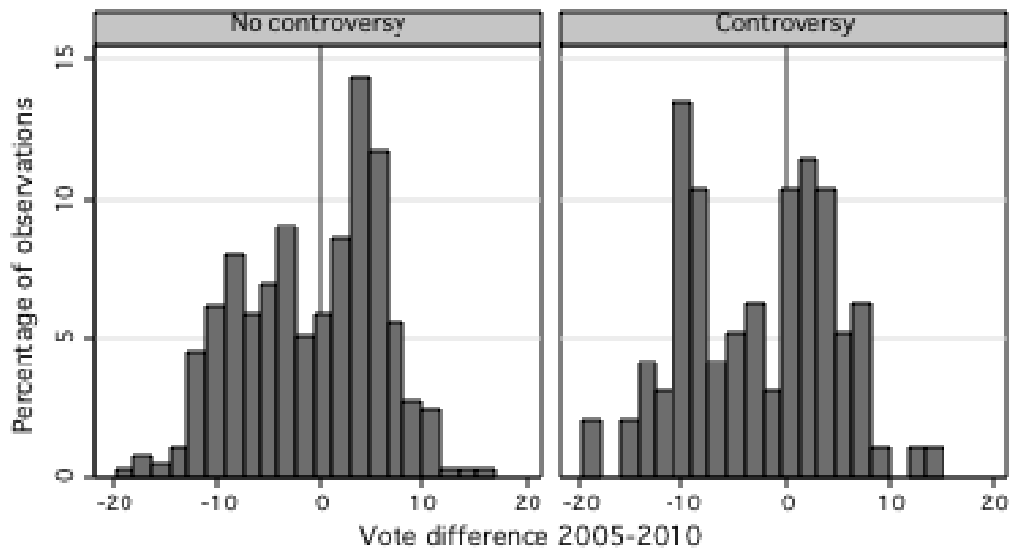
relationship is that all the Labour MPs who had a financial scandal within a year of the election retired: the cash-for-influence and cash-for-access MPs make up the bulk of this group.

The data presented in Table 6.4 demonstrates that, across the board, MPs who had financial scandals had the largest percentage of retirements of any controversy category. Having had a policy controversy within a year of the election led to 50 % of those Labour MPs standing down. As the majority of these controversies were associated with rebellion against Gordon Brown's leadership it is not surprising that many retired as he led the party into the general election. None of the other types of controversy seem to be highly correlated with standing down. This ratio of financial scandals to retirements could lead to the hypothesis of internal sanctioning by the Labour Party of these types of cases. This relationship, as always, comes with the caveat that we cannot know with complete confidence that the MPs in question retired as a result of their controversies. It is also important to consider the fact that MPs may have had a controversy within a year of the election as well as another previously. This may also have an impact on these results.

6.5 Results – vote share and political controversy 2010

The insignificant role of political controversy in explaining the differential in MP vote shares in the 1997 case is foreboding vis-à-vis its impact in 2010. However, there was a tremendous amount of attention paid to MPs' personal behaviour before the last election, especially relating to the expenses scandal. Figure 6.4 graphically demonstrates the differences in MP vote shares between 2005 and 2010 split by whether or not an MP had a political controversy.

Figure 6.4: Change in vote share 2005–2010



There is not a tremendous amount of variation between the vote shares for MPs who had a controversy and those who did not. There is a spike at the -10 percentage point mark for those MPs who had a controversy indicating that there were a great deal of losses between five and 15 percentage points. Conversely, there is a large and consistently dense portion of the group who had no controversy and yet lost up to ten points off their 2005 vote share. The same scenario holds for those whose vote share differential between 2005 and 2010 was positive. There are a number of MPs who were controversy free and gained up to ten points on their previous vote share as well as a substantive group of MPs who gained the same amount but had a controversy. All in all, Figure 6.4 depicts a scenario where it appears that the change in an MP's vote share is not correlated to whether or not they had a controversy in the 2005–2010 election period. The range of vote share values is generally similar for both groups.

I use the difference in an MP's vote share between the 2005 and 2010 elections as my dependent variable. In order to get the most accurate estimate of the effect of political controversy on

vote share I first only use those constituencies that did not undergo any boundary changes. After excluding those constituencies where the sitting MP retired, I was left with only 104 unaltered constituencies.

Table 6.5 highlights the insignificant impact of political controversy across all estimations when MPs from all parties are considered together. While the sign of the coefficient is negative, which one would expect it to be, the magnitude of the values is much reduced from the 1997 estimations. Having had a political controversy shaves off less than two percentage points in Models 1, 2 and 3 of Table 6.5. The controversy variable does not even come close to statistical significance at the ten per cent level in both marginal and non-marginal constituencies. All the models presented in Table 6.5 demonstrate that while those MPs who had a controversy did lose a bit more than the rest of their vote share, controversy does not realistically help to explain the differential in vote shares between 2005 and 2010.

A few independent variables are statistically significant though. Table 6.5 Model 2 shows that frontbench Conservative MPs during the 2005–2010 Parliament received nearly a four and a half point boost in their vote share as compared to those Conservatives who were never promoted from the backbenches (this figure drops to 3.45 in Model 3). One can assume that those MPs who were on the frontbenches (including the shadow cabinet) had a higher public profile and would be viewed as an integral part of the Conservative team. In turn, this could explain why this characteristic provided MPs who fit the category with an increase in their vote share. Voters are likely to be supportive of powerful and prominent MPs.

Table 6.5: Vote share – no boundary change constituencies 2010

	All MPs			Labour MPs			Conservative MPs		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
Controversy	-1.77 (1.69)	-1.04 (1.64)	-1.36 (1.93)	-1.13 (2.41)	-1.85 (2.68)	-2.33 (2.86)	1.03 (2.31)	1.14 (2.07)	1.88 (1.26)
In Government		-0.99 (1.64)	-1.31 (1.59)		1.42 (2.01)	0.71 (2.19)			
Frontbench		4.38*** (1.23)	3.45* (1.50)					0.84 (1.30)	-0.17 (1.21)
Lib Dem Frontbench		-0.84 (1.82)	-1.62 (1.96)						
Marginality			0.08 (1.36)			-2.27 (2.23)			-0.66 (1.40)
Implicated Expenses			-1.73 (1.44)			-0.86 (2.74)			-0.77 (1.52)
Age			-0.15* (0.07)			0.08 (0.14)			-0.18+ (0.09)
Gender			2.70 (1.81)			1.76 (2.30)			
Lawyer			0.52 (1.73)			1.33 (3.11)			-0.93 (1.52)
Oxbridge			-1.43 (1.52)			-6.59* (2.53)			1.01 (1.16)
Controversy*Marginality			-4.05 (4.20)			-1.08 (4.26)			-5.08* (1.84)
Intercept	-0.24 (0.69)	-0.53 (0.95)	7.20+ (4.24)	-2.08* (1.01)	-2.66* (1.23)	3.85 (8.55)	3.37*** (0.64)	2.83* (1.06)	13.26** (3.96)
N	104	104	104	58	58	58	21	21	21
R ²	0.01	0.08	0.16	0.00	0.01	0.16	0.01	0.04	0.36

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

That said, the effect does not hold when Conservative MPs are analysed as a sub-group (Models 7, 8 and 9), implying that the effect in Models 2 and 3 pick up the swing towards the Conservative party.

Interestingly, political controversy is statistically significant in marginal constituencies for Conservative MPs (Model 9). The result is caveated by the fact that there are only 21 cases in the analysis making it difficult to draw any substantive conclusions. However, it is still important to note that those MPs lost an additional 3.92 percentage points off their vote.

Only two other independent variables are statistically significant in explaining the difference in vote share between 2005 and 2010 across all parties considered together as well as Labour and Conservative MPs analysed in isolation. The coefficients on the age variable are -0.15 (Model 3) and -0.18 (Model 9), denoting that in the analysis of MPs of all parties the older an MP gets he or she loses less than two tenths of a percentage point off their vote share and the same is true for Conservative MPs as a group. One would not expect that result to make a tremendous amount of difference on the dependent variable because of the coefficient size. Interestingly, Labour MPs who attended Oxbridge lost over an additional six and a half percentage points at the polls compared to those who went to other universities or did not attend university at all. Though there is the obvious caveat that the sample size is small, the effect is still pronounced. Twelve per cent of the sample of Labour MPs analysed here went to Oxbridge with an average vote difference of -8.34. In a group of this size, this could surely make a difference, especially when considered in light of the fact that the average vote difference for the 58 Labour MPs in the sample is -2.3. However, I remain cautious to argue that the Oxbridge variable shows a trend against a particular characteristic or type of politician in this instance and instead believe it boils down to an issue of sample size.

As in the case of the Oxbridge variable in Table 6.5, having such small sample sizes complicates the interpretation of these results. It is extremely difficult to deduce what is going on across parliament from a fraction of its members. While I maintain that this is the most accurate way

to approach the data as the aim of this set of regressions is to establish personal accountability, I have also run the same set of regressions for all MPs who stood again in 2010 to see if there are any differences in the outcomes.

Table 6.6: Vote share – all constituencies 2010

	All MPs	Labour MPs	Conservative MPs
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Controversy	-0.62 (0.80)	-0.31 (1.11)	-1.77* (0.85)
In Government	-3.66*** (0.75)	-0.26 (0.86)	
Frontbench	5.05*** (0.61)		0.37 (0.66)
Lib Dem Frontbench	1.46 (1.01)		
Marginality	1.63* (0.65)	0.60 (0.97)	0.69 (0.69)
Implicated Expenses	-1.23* (0.57)	-1.86* (0.86)	-0.68 (0.52)
Age	-0.09** (0.03)	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.04)
Gender	1.45+ (0.75)	0.81 (0.90)	-1.74 (0.85)
Lawyer	1.44+ (0.77)	1.78 (1.65)	-0.55 (0.69)
Oxbridge	0.40 (0.60)	-0.79 (1.03)	0.82 (0.50)
Controversy*Marginality	-0.35 (1.74)	-2.38 (1.82)	2.58 (2.05)
Intercept	2.35 (2.14)	-4.14 (3.04)	6.67** (2.31)
N	473	242	155
R ²	0.30	0.04	0.11

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Table 6.6 demonstrates a negative, but insignificant impact of political controversy for MPs considered in aggregate and for Labour MPs considered in isolation. Controversy is a statistically significant variable in Model 3 of Table 6.6 where Conservative MPs who had a controversy lost 1.77 additional points off their vote share compared to the rest of their party colleagues. The effect is significant at the five per cent level.

Model 1 in Table 6.6 reveals that when MPs from all parties are considered together, having been in the Labour Government or on the Conservative frontbench is significant in explaining the difference in an MP's vote share. Members of the Labour Government lost more than three and a half points more than those who sat on the backbenches and Conservative frontbenchers gained over five

points more than their backbench colleagues. Both variables are highly significant at the 0.001 level. If considering MPs from all parties as a group, these findings demonstrate the importance of being a high profile MP. If the MP is from the party in power that is leaving office, they suffer more for being a prominent member of the team and if the MP is a member of the party that is coming into power, then they benefit more than others. However, as this analysis also considers MPs in sub-groups based on their partisan affiliation, these results are found to be party-based effects and do not remain significant in Models 2 and 3 where Labour and Conservative MPs are considered on their own as in previous estimations.

The level of marginality of an MP's constituency is statistically significant in Model 1. The positive value of the coefficient demonstrates that MPs in marginal constituencies gained an additional 1.63 percentage points. As the effect disappears when considering MPs by party affiliation, it is difficult to interpret this finding. Having been implicated in the expenses scandal is statistically significant in Models 1 and 2. In Model 1, MPs (from all parties) who were implicated lost just over one percentage point more than those who were not implicated in the scandal and the effect is more pronounced for Labour MPs who were implicated as they lost 1.86 points relative to their non-implicated party members. As this variable is not significant in Model 3, it appears that Labour MPs drive the result in Model 1. The fact that being involved in the expenses scandal hurt Labour MPs and not Conservatives implies that even though it was a HOC-wide scandal it was the party in power that took the brunt of the blame. This percentage point loss is also in line with aggregate analyses which estimate that the electoral cost of implication in the expenses scandal was around one and a half percentage points (Curtice et al., 2010; Eggers and Fischer, 2011; Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming).

Male MPs gained more points than their female counterparts at the polls (Model 1). On average, male MPs gained just under one and a half percentage points more than female MPs. And

those MPs who were lawyers before entering Parliament saw a boost in their vote share of nearly one and a half percentage points compared to those who entered the HOC from other professions.

One must be sceptical of these findings regarding their ability to say something substantive about an individual MP's accountability since the majority of the MPs analysed here had the boundaries of their constituency significantly altered before the 2010 election. It follows that the findings do not cleanly measure the impact of these characteristics since notional vote shares have been used to calculate the value of the dependent variable. That said, boundary changes are a consistent fact of British political life and it seems that it is not going to change any time soon. Therefore, it is interesting that controversy matters for explaining Conservatives MPs' vote share as opposed to Labour as the trend seems to be that the party in power suffers more than the opposition. The value of the controversy variable's coefficient is not that large at -1.77, but that there is any significant effect at all is worth noting (Model 3 Table 6.6).

Overall, Conservative vote shares still increased, as one would expect, with an average gain of just over four percentage points. Furthermore, Conservatives who had a controversy of any type still gained points from their 2005 vote share except for those with a performance controversy who lost a mere 0.03 off their vote. Table 6.7 highlights the average difference in vote share for MPs across all parties dependent on the type of controversy in the top panel and the same information in relation to Labour MPs only in the bottom panel.

Across all MPs, performance controversies had the greatest impact on vote share. They lost nearly five percentage points as compared to a HOC-wide average loss of just over one percentage point and MPs who had a financial scandal lost just over three points off their vote. MPs who had an 'other' controversy actually gained points from their 2005 vote, but with a value of just one tenth of a percentage point.

Table 6.7: Type of controversy and vote share

All MPs (N=473)	Average Vote Difference 2005-2010
Sexual Scandal	-0.98
Financial Scandal	-3.14
Policy Controversy	-1.20
Performance Controversy	-4.85
Other Controversy	0.10
Commons Average	-1.24
Labour MPs (N=242)	Average Vote Difference 2005-2010
Sexual Scandal	-10.51
Financial Scandal	-8.92
Policy Controversy	-5.13
Performance Controversy	-5.95
Other Controversy	-5.12
Labour Average	-5.13

The bottom panel of Table 6.7 contains the average vote shares for Labour MPs split by type of controversy. The average vote share difference between 2005 and 2010 for Labour MPs was -5.13 points. Those MPs who had a sexual scandal had the greatest loss, losing more than double the Labour average (-10.51). Financial scandals also hit Labour MPs hard with losses, on average, of nearly nine percentage points. Labour MPs who had a policy, performance or ‘other’ controversy all lost about the same amount as the Labour average. The figures suggest that only those Labour MPs who had sexual and financial scandals (the more traditional types of scandals) had their vote shares substantially affected.

If one considers both groups, it is clear that Labour MPs (bottom panel) were driving the negative vote share results for all MPs (top panel). The only group that seems to have been seriously hurt by scandal or controversy were those Labour MPs who had sexual or financial scandals. As MPs could have more than one controversy, it is possible that a second type of controversy is driving the finding. However, the average vote share losses are substantially increased from the average thereby demonstrating an effect of sexual and financial scandals on Labour vote shares. It follows that

although controversy is not a statistically significant variable in explaining the change in Labour MPs vote shares from 2005 to 2010, controversy appears to negatively affect their vote share in certain cases.³³

6.6 Discussion – internal sanctions

From the analysis conducted in this chapter, it appears that similar trends are present in both the 1997 and 2010 elections. Though there was a different party in power and a different variety of scandals and controversy on offer, the effects were largely the same. Political controversy was a significant predictor of the probability of retiring in both elections for the party in power and, by extension, in models including MPs from all parties.

The number of months before the next election was shown to be an important factor in analysing the strength of the effect of controversy on retirement. This was true in both 1997 and 2010. Those MPs who had a controversy within a year of the election saw a tremendous increase in the probability of standing down, over 35 % in the case of Labour MPs in 2010. This suggests that these cases may have had a stronger effect on the decision to retire compared to controversies that occurred at any time during the 1992–1997 or 2005–2010 parliaments.

The relationship between political controversy and retirement is tempered by the significant effect of age on the probability of standing down. The magnitude of the effect is small by contrast. However, its importance to the research question here cannot be underestimated as age is one of the only variables that we can be sure has an effect on the decision to retire. Having acknowledged the crucial role that age plays in explaining whether an MP stands down, we are left with an interesting tale of internal sanction to dissect.

³³ For the 2010 case, I modelled the impact of specific types of controversy on the change in MPs' vote shares in constituencies without boundary changes and found no effect for MPs considered in aggregate, a negative effect for Labour MPs that had a policy controversy and a positive effect for those with an 'other' controversy. There is no clear pattern to these results.

Any analyst of politics knows that nothing is for certain. There are cases where the relationship between an MP's controversy and their retirement has been directly identified, as in the case of Geoff Hoon's retirement ahead of the 2010 election (Parker, *The Financial Times*, 11 February 2010). However, it is not always that clear. It follows that I therefore do not argue that the strong association between controversy and retirement is definitively the product of administrative control. Other factors that have been discussed might inform this calculation, as well as a multitude of others that have not been addressed in this work. The factor of greatest note is probably the predicted losses for the party in power in both 1997 and 2010 – politicians, like everyone else, do not like to lose. They may have deselected themselves, choosing retirement irrespective of controversy or party opinion. However, while many of the MPs who stood down had been in Government for 18 or 13 years respectively, the average age of the HOC was still hovering around the mid-50s, allowing room to think that many MPs would have considered another five years of parliament if they thought they would be re-elected or were supported to run again.

Given these facts, it is worth considering that an MP's decision to retire is influenced by the party management, an internal sanctioning device to push aside members who have caused the party's reputation harm. One cannot ignore the fact that there are cases of MPs standing again despite having had controversies (Farrell, et al., 1998), but at the same time the results presented here indicate a connection between having had a controversy and an increase in the probability of standing down. It follows that if internal sanction is to be a plausible explanation of many of these retirements, the party's perception of an MP's controversy is extremely important. This is made up of both an internal viewpoint as well as feedback from the public – political decisions feed off public (dis)approval and are directly informed by public opinion. We see this at play in major controversies where the PM or leader of the party takes cues from not only the facts of the case, but the general mood surrounding it.

The increase in the probability of retiring from parliament for MPs who had a controversy versus those who did not are significant. The trend is too pronounced to ignore, especially when one considers the increase in the probability for those who had a controversy within a year of the election. In addition, the strong administrative role of party officials and the watchdog profile of party associations suggest that this finding may not be merely coincidental.

The potential existence of an internal sanctioning device as a legitimate explanation of this result represents a form of accountability in British politics. While it does not fit the description in the traditional sense of electoral sanction, it still points to individual MPs being treated differently for their behaviour and losing something as a result. It shows an awareness of the types of behaviours studied in this work and suggests that they do matter in the electoral context.

This form of accountability is another dimension of the strength of party politics in the UK. Before a predicted change in government, those in power weed out some of the candidates with question marks next to their names. One can imagine these issues to have been even more important in the two elections studied here as they were so plagued by scandal and controversy. The fact that the trend does not generally exist for the main opposition party is an indicator of the significance of this process for parties that are on the defensive.

The opposition can rest easy knowing that their party 'brand' will carry them through while those in power are forced to more closely micromanage their representatives. Further, this process makes sense no matter what type of controversy an MP was or is embroiled in. Financial and sexual scandals have obvious negative connotations for political parties, those MPs who have had a policy controversy cause trouble and those who have performed badly have shown weakness in their capacity to do their job well. All of these actions damage the reputation of the party. Why would the party want to keep these politicians on the precipice of fighting a tight election when a fresh candidate certainly seems like a better option?

Internal sanction by the party administration is just one plausible explanation for this set of results, but it is an important one. As previously discussed, there are many factors that could contribute to an MP's decision to retire. This work looks at two closely: political controversy and an MP's age. The results show a strong and significant effect for each. It follows that the data indicates political controversy as an important predictor of the probability that an MP retires and the connection between the two suggests the plausibility of the argument for internal sanctioning playing a role in these decisions.

6.7 Discussion – electoral sanctions

The evidence is quite clear that elections are not used as a mechanism to hold individual MPs accountable for the types of controversy analysed here. While it may be that the controversies under investigation are not the type of events that would rile voters enough to affect their vote, they have been carefully selected for the nature of their news coverage and the (potential) effect on the reputation of an MP.

The findings from the regressions that use change in vote share as the dependent variable refute my initial theory that individual background characteristics, ranging from having had a political controversy to gender and professional background, have a place in the story of British voting behaviour. While they do reveal some interesting trends in retirement patterns, they are, on the whole, lacking in substance as explanatory variables. Despite this, the theoretical motivation for including them is substantiated by the rise of valence issue voting in the UK and relative declines in traditional voting behaviours. While these particular variables may not capture any major trends, the notion of the prototypical politician is part of the literature on political elites and an interesting exercise in exploring the dimensions of party politics in the UK.

The ever-present shifting of boundaries is an obvious problem in a study of individual MP accountability. On the one hand, it perhaps does not matter much since British voters have tended to

be tied to the political party they support. By logical extension, every Conservative is the same as the next and so on and so forth. What is really important is the party the voter wants in power and not necessarily the individual MP candidate. However, MPs can serve a valuable purpose to their constituents. They can represent their interests well in parliament and do constituency work. In this scenario the frequent shifting of boundaries and creation of new constituencies is extremely harmful to fostering a demonstrable and beneficial relationship between the governors and the governed, a cornerstone of democracy.

My study of those constituencies with unaltered boundaries does not demonstrate electoral sanction. One could argue that many of the worst offenders would have retired/been forced out before the elections actually took place. However, we do know that many did re-stand (i.e. Neil Hamilton in 1997). Inevitably, most who chose to re-stand did so in altered constituencies, but the results indicate that political controversy did not seriously affect voting decisions for Britons in 1997 or 2010 and that other issues were more salient.

In order to further address political accountability in Britain, I take the expenses scandal as a case study in the next chapter. It addresses the variants of accountability already covered with added emphasis on a direct measure of constituent perceptions using BES survey data. Additionally, it offers a reading of a scandal that engulfed MPs from all parties therefore providing further valuable insight into the issue of partisanship in assessing MPs' behaviour.

Chapter 7: The 2009–2010 parliamentary expenses scandal

7.1 Close-up on expenses

Thus far this research has delved into the impact of political controversy on an MP's career. It has demonstrated the rise in the probability of retiring for MPs who have been embroiled in political controversies. In contrast, it has also shown that controversies do not appear to be a significant factor in the electorate's vote choice. This finding indicates other issues are more important to voters on election day, whether they be the economy or education (Farrell et al., 1998) or, more broadly, the partisan affiliation of the MP. While the results regarding standing down are encouraging in terms of personal accountability, the effect could also be a product of selection on the part of the party administration. Overall though, the main results indicate that elections are not used as an accountability mechanism to punish public officials who have caused more trouble than the average MP.

As a consequence of this, a focused study on a specific scandal might elucidate trends that the analysis of political controversy more generally would have missed. It is plausible that voters would be riled over a major scandal as opposed to an MP's policy fight within his or her party and it follows that the recent expenses scandal proved an excellent example to test the effect of scandal on voters. We³⁴ set out to understand the effects of the 2009–2010 expenses scandal on voters by not only focusing on vote choice, but also voter attitudes and perceptions. My analysis of the 1997 and 2010 elections shows that there is room to further examine political controversy and its effect (if any) in order to see if there is a relationship between scandal and electoral accountability in the British political scene.

³⁴ As previously mentioned, the analysis in this chapter is conjoint work with Dr Nick Vivyan and Dr Markus Wagner. I therefore use the term "we" throughout.

The premise of this study is broadly similar to that which frames the entire thesis. For a political representative to be held electorally accountable for wrongdoing while in office, three conditions must be present: (1) information about the politician's wrongdoing must be made public; (2) voters must form or update their perceptions about the politician's conduct based on this information; and (3) voters must take electoral choices based on these beliefs. We test the functioning of this electoral accountability chain in the context of the 2009–2010 UK expenses scandal as it provides an advantageous setting for such a test because we can use panel survey data to compare the perceptions and subsequent electoral choices of voters whose MP was implicated in the scandal with voters whose MP was not.

7.2 Introduction to the study

As previously discussed, regular elections provide a potential mechanism for constituents to hold representatives accountable for their performance in office (Key, 1966; Ferejohn, 1986; Besley, 2006). Voters can use elections to hold representatives to account for a variety of aspects of their record in office. For instance, they may reward and punish incumbents for their handling of the economy (see e.g. Powell and Whitten, 1993; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; Samuels and Hellwig, 2010) or for their policy stances as expressed in votes in the legislature (Canes-Wrone et al., 2002; Ansolabehere and Jones, 2010; Vivyan and Wagner, 2012). Sometimes, when voters believe that their representative has engaged in ethically deficient behaviour while in office they will try to hold him or her accountable for this (Rundquist et al., 1977; Peters and Welch, 1980; Chang et al., 2010).

If elections are to function as an effective mechanism for holding representatives to account for misbehaviour, voters need to form reasonably accurate beliefs about this behaviour and then condition subsequent electoral choices on these beliefs (Ferejohn, 1986; Przeworski et al., 1999;

Besley, 2006). This logic implies three necessary steps: exposure, perception and sanction. First, information regarding the misbehaviour of a politician is made publicly available, for example through investigative reporting by the media. Second, citizens process this public information and form or update perceptions about the integrity of a politician's actions. Finally, citizens take electoral decisions based on these perceptions by casting their vote in such a way that politicians perceived as guilty of misconduct are less likely to retain office.

Once misconduct has been exposed, accountability can therefore fail at either the perception or the sanction step in this sequence. Existing research provides reasons to be sceptical about the effective operation of both steps. First, constituent perceptions may be non-existent or wrong: voters may be ignorant of their representative's behaviour (Pattie and Johnston, 2004; Holmberg, 2009) or develop biased perceptions of his or her record (e.g. Peters and Welch, 1980). Second, constituents may fail to sanction perceived misconduct. This can happen when voters are not willing or able to use their vote to punish representatives for wrongdoing. This is strongly influenced by political institutions: for example, an electoral system can force a voter to choose between party lists (Carey and Shugart, 1995; Persson and Tabellini, 2000; Persson et al., 2003; Kunicová and Rose-Ackerman, 2005), while a party-oriented political system means voters may be more concerned about the partisan make-up of a legislature than the conduct of any one individual legislator (Cain et al., 1987; Carey and Shugart, 1995) as seen in the previous two chapters.

It is important to understand whether constituents hold their representatives to account for misconduct and if not whether accountability is hindered at the perception or the sanction step of the sequence. If we want to encourage electoral accountability for misconduct and reform institutions appropriately, we need to know where the limitations and problems in the sanctioning process lie.

The UK expenses scandal provides a particularly advantageous setting in which to answer our research question. First, a large number of sitting legislators were publicly implicated for similar

types of misconduct in a relatively short space of time. This allows us to compare across legislators implicated and not implicated in scandal while holding the type of scandal and the national political circumstances relatively constant. To our knowledge, the only other episode which has these characteristics is the US House Banking Scandal (Dimock and Jacobson, 1995; Ahuja et al., 1994; Banducci and Karp, 1994; Clarke et al., 1999). This examination extends the study of voter responses to representative misbehaviour to a more party-oriented political system.

Second, the British Election Study (BES) measured voter perceptions regarding their MP's expenses claims shortly after the publication of the official report investigating the scandal. We supplement these voter-level survey responses with new data on MPs' implication in the expenses scandal. As a result, we are able to test directly whether perceptions of MP misconduct respond to public information about that MP and in turn whether voters condition subsequent electoral choices on these perceptions.

Third, the BES survey that measures constituent perceptions of an MP's involvement in the expenses scandal is one wave of a panel. Existing voter-level studies of electoral accountability in the context of the US House Banking Scandal and the expenses scandal (Curtice et al., 2010; Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming) rely on aggregate data, cross-section survey data or pre- and post-election panel survey data. By using panel survey data that covers a five-year period, we are able to control for measures of respondent political predispositions taken prior to the expenses scandal, which are therefore not themselves affected by exposure to the scandal.

While the UK expenses scandal thus provides clean and separate tests of two key types of accountability (perception and sanction), the UK setting also provides for a traditional test of these steps. Although the majority of British voters believe that it is important for politicians in general to behave honestly (Birch and Allen, 2011), the party-centred nature of the British political system appears to work against voters learning about the conduct of their specific MP and conditioning

electoral choices on this conduct. In particular, British voters tend to see their choice as one between national parties rather than between potential local MPs (Cain et al., 1987; Carey and Shugart, 1995; Kam, 2009). The evidence presented in the analysis of the 1997 and 2010 election supports this reading of the British political system.

Nevertheless, in spite of these contextual constraints, our findings suggest that the perceptions step in the electoral accountability chain does function relatively well in Britain: although ignorance and bias exist, British voters were much more likely to think that their MP had overclaimed on expenses when that MP was publicly implicated in the expenses scandal. In addition, there is evidence that the sanction step works as well: at the margin, voters were less likely to vote for their incumbent MP when they believed that the MP had overclaimed on expenses. Yet, the link between perceptions of misconduct and vote choice is not particularly strong, especially compared to the link between information and perceptions. Further evidence of this is that on election day, the effect of MP implication in the scandal was estimated to be an approximate one and a half percentage point loss (Curtice et al., 2010; Eggers and Fischer, 2011; Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming), much less than one would expect considering the level of outrage the scandal provoked.

7.3 Electoral accountability for misconduct

Information about misconduct by representatives can become public in different ways. The media plays an important role in investigating, uncovering and publicising misbehaviour. This can easily turn into a gatekeeping role, as was the case in the expenses scandal, where *The Telegraph* newspaper had exclusive access to leaked details of MPs' expense claims and could choose which details it made public (for more details on the scandal, see Kelso, 2009). Beginning in May 2009, *The Telegraph* ran stories on excessive or questionable claims for several weeks, and the scandal quickly engulfed a large number of MPs and received widespread media attention.

However, the media is not the only way in which information about misconduct is publicly

revealed. In some cases, representatives' misconduct may be exposed by an official investigation or governmental body. For example, the 1992 US House Banking Scandal was triggered when the General Accounting Office issued a report detailing the misbehaviour of members (Dimock and Jacobson, 1995). In the case of the expenses scandal, the HOC reacted to relentless media revelations by commissioning Sir Thomas Legg to investigate all MPs' claims in detail. Legg's final report, published in February 2010 (House of Commons Members Estimate Committee, 2010), focused on overly excessive claims made within the Additional Costs Allowance, a scheme that allowed MPs to claim money to pay for and maintain a second home, either in their constituency or in London.³⁵

It is of course unlikely that many voters would consult the official report into the scandal directly, so awareness of misconduct exposed by an official investigation tends to spread via the national or local media. Campaign groups, local competing candidates and the MPs themselves can also relay official information regarding misconduct to constituents (Arnold, 1993).

7.4 Perceptions

The public availability of information detailing misconduct is not enough for accountability to exist: voters also need to incorporate this information into their beliefs about the conduct of their representative. Yet, it is perhaps unreasonable to expect voters to be very informed about their representative's conduct since gathering such information is costly (Ferejohn, 1990). Furthermore, if voters' levels of political knowledge are also a product of political institutions (Stevenson and Vonnahme, 2009; Holmberg, 2009), we can expect ignorance about representatives to exist in the UK.

Bias in perceptions is another such factor. To reduce the costs associated with information-gathering, it is likely that individuals will make use of heuristics when forming an opinion about their

³⁵ See Besley and Larcinese (2011) for a more detailed discussion of the different types of expenses allowances available to British MPs.

representative (Ferejohn, 1990) as discussed in Chapter Two. A simple decision rule may allow voters to make judgements about their representative even while remaining relatively ignorant about the representative's actual behaviour. Two such rules of thumb may be particularly influential in the British context: affect towards an MP and affect towards the MP's party. Voters may be less likely to think that their MP misbehaved if they are positively predisposed towards him or her, for example due to that MP's constituency and parliamentary work (Cain et al., 1987). They may also develop biased perceptions based on party attachment. Recent findings from the UK (e.g. Marsh and Tilley, 2010; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011) indicate that theories of partisan perceptual bias (Campbell et al., 1960) travel well.

7.5 Sanctions

Despite these institutional constraints, some voters may nevertheless form an accurate perception regarding their representative's conduct. They also then have to decide whether or not this perception should influence their vote choice. As we have seen, some voters will believe that other concerns, such as the balance of power in parliament or other pressing national issues, are more important than the misbehaviour of their representative (Farrell, et al., 1998; Rundquist et al., 1977). Other voters will decide to punish a representative who they believe has engaged in wrongdoing. In the latter case, we can speak of electoral accountability for misconduct: publicly available information about an MP's misconduct influences voter perceptions, which in turn partly determine electoral choices.

The specific electoral effects of the 2009–10 expenses scandal have already been studied using aggregate constituency-level data (Curtice et al., 2010; Eggers and Fischer, 2011; Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming) and survey data with a pre- and post-election panel (Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming). These studies find that involvement in the scandal had a small negative effect on the

electoral success of incumbent MPs. We add to the understanding of the impact of the expenses scandal by explicitly and separately testing the link between MP involvement and constituent perceptions on the one hand and between constituent perceptions and vote choice on the other.

7.6 MP involvement in the expenses scandal

In order to analyse constituent responses to MP misconduct, we present a new measure of whether each British³⁶ MP who sat in the 2005–10 Parliament was publicly implicated in the expenses scandal. This measure is constructed based on two sources: the Legg report together with *The Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* (one combined source). As in my description of the expenses scandal in Chapter Three, an MP was ‘implicated’ by Legg if they were formally asked to repay money in his report. An MP was also ‘implicated’ by *The Telegraph* if the *specifics* of the MP’s claim were discussed in a *Telegraph* article (MPs are not coded as ‘implicated’ by *The Telegraph* if their claims were only mentioned in a general article on the scandal).³⁷ We focus on *The Telegraph* as a media source because it had sole access to the expenses records and acted as a gatekeeper on public information; prior to the publication of the Legg report, any MP publicly implicated was therefore first mentioned by *The Telegraph*.

The final ‘implicated’ variable equals 1 if an MP is coded as being implicated by either *The Telegraph* or the Legg report, and 0 otherwise as in previous chapters. The rationale for combining data from two main sources, *The Telegraph* and the Legg report, is to create a catch-all variable that realistically captures whether or not an MP was publicly exposed as having made dubious claims. The Legg report did not encompass all potential types of expenses-related misconduct; some expenses claim issues were outside Legg’s remit, while smaller claims may have been within the

³⁶ We exclude the 18 Northern Ireland MPs from our analysis since the British Election Study did not survey Northern Ireland residents.

³⁷ We searched *The Daily Telegraph* and *Sunday Telegraph* articles published between 1 January 2009 and 26 March 2010, via NexisUK (an electronic media search engine). A general article refers to those pieces where *The Telegraph* listed the claims of five or more MPs without specific details of, for example, the amount an MP claimed per year.

rules but nevertheless seemed excessive to constituents. For instance, Geoffrey Clifton Brown, who was the Conservative Shadow Minister for International Development, ‘flipped’ (i.e. changed) his second home designation from London to his Gloucestershire home and, at the same time, bought another countryside home for almost three million pounds. His case garnered tremendous media attention and ridicule, but he was not asked to repay any money by Legg. In contrast, Alun Michael’s claims were not detailed in *The Telegraph*, but he was ordered in the Legg report to repay over £19,000 for invalid mortgage claims. These types of cases illustrate the importance of using both sources to capture public implication in the scandal.

Overall we have 587 MP-level observations on our implicated variable.³⁸ Of these, just over two-thirds (418) are coded as implicated and just under a third (169) are not. This illustrates a useful feature of the expenses scandal for empirically examining electoral accountability for representative misconduct: the fact that a large (though not overwhelming) proportion of sitting MPs was publicly exposed for the same types of misconduct in a short time frame.

7.7 Constituent perceptions of misconduct: data and analysis

To test the first step in the electoral accountability chain outlined above, we combined our new measure of MP involvement in the expenses scandal with BES panel data. This allowed us to examine whether constituents’ perceptions of MPs’ conduct were influenced by public information concerning this behaviour.

We used survey data from four waves of the BES 2005–2010 internet panel study³⁹: the first

³⁸ There were 628 sitting British MPs in the 2005–10 Parliament. We excluded four groups of MPs when coding our implicated variable: MPs representing inner-London constituencies, as they were not allowed to claim expenses under the Additional Costs Allowance and are therefore less likely to be implicated in the scandal; the three MPs involved in criminal proceedings as a result of their expenses claims, as their misbehaviour was qualitatively different from that of other MPs; the MPs elected in by-elections between 2005 and 2010, because the survey respondents did not vote for these MPs in 2005 and because they often had less chance to be involved in the scandal; and an MP who died in March 2010, so just before the period the survey was fielded.

³⁹ The BES ran parallel internet and face-to-face surveys in 2005, and detailed inspection has shown that the samples are almost indistinguishable (Sanders et al., 2007). Sanders et al. (2011) also report that the 2005–2010 panel continued to be representative of the population in terms of their reported vote and their vote intention.

wave, which was carried out in March and April 2005 before that year's general election; the third wave, from May 2005 and after that year's election; the fifth wave, from June 2008; and the seventh wave, from late March/early April 2010, before that year's election. Based on their location, defined in terms of the 2005 General Election boundaries, each survey respondent was matched to an MP from the 2005–2010 Parliament and assigned the corresponding implicated score for that MP.⁴⁰ We retained only survey respondents located in one of the 587 constituencies for which there is a non-missing value on our MP implicated variable. Our resulting data set contains observations on respondents from 579 of the 587 constituencies for which we measure our implicated variable, with an average of five respondents per constituency. Of the 3218 respondents in this data, almost 70 % (2245) were represented in the 2005–10 Parliament by an MP who was implicated in the scandal by *The Telegraph* or by Sir Thomas Legg. The remaining 30 % (973) had an MP who was not implicated in the expenses scandal.

To measure respondent perceptions regarding the propriety of the expenses claims made by their MP, we used their responses to a question from the seventh wave of the survey. Respondents were asked whether they had heard or read about the expenses scandal. Those answering “yes” were then presented with the following:

Now, thinking about the MP in your local constituency, has he or she claimed expense money to which they are not entitled?

The response options were “yes”, “no” and “don't know”. These responses are the main dependent variable, which measures whether or not a respondent perceives their MP to have been guilty of overclaiming on expenses.⁴¹ The question was fielded just before the 2010 election campaign got underway but after the February 2010 Legg report and, as a result, it measures constituent beliefs about MPs' expenses claims shortly after the last public revelations concerning the scandal.

⁴⁰ The BES matches respondents to seats using the postcodes provided by the participants.

⁴¹ We add to the “don't knows” the very small number of respondents who in the previous question indicated they had not heard of the scandal at all.

7.8 Descriptive analysis

Table 7.1 breaks down respondent perceptions of their MP's expenses claims according to whether or not the MP was publicly implicated in the scandal or not.⁴² The first notable feature of this table is that almost half of the 3218 respondents (44.9 %) “don't know” whether or not their MP overclaimed. That such a high proportion of respondents felt unable to form a clear opinion on the claims of their MP would appear congruous with expectations that a large proportion of British voters are relatively uninformed about the conduct of their local MP. This of course places an immediate limit on the operation of the perceptions step.

Table 7.1: MP involvement in expenses scandal

	Don't know	Did not overclaim	Overclaimed	Marginal N
Not implicated	46.6 % (453)	40.8 % (397)	12.6 % (123)	973
Implicated	44.2 % (993)	25.7 % (577)	30.1 % (675)	2245
All MPs	44.9 % (1446)	30.3 % (974)	24.8 % (798)	3218

It also appears from Table 7.1 that voters who do form an opinion (i.e. do not answer “don't know”) have a tendency to attribute innocence to their own MP, a finding that echoes Fenno's (1978) well-known paradox that American voters tend to disapprove of Congress but trust their district's representative. The bottom row shows that of the 1772 respondents who state an opinion, over half (55 %) think their MP did not overclaim.

But despite this, there is clear evidence of an association between public implication of an MP in the scandal and respondents' perceptions. Of respondents whose MP was not implicated, 40.8 %

⁴² The distribution of responses to this question is very similar in the BES 2010 cross-sectional pre-campaign internet survey, which has the advantage of a larger number of respondents. The main difference is that the number of “don't knows” increases slightly, probably a consequence of panel attrition.

think their MP did not overclaim, compared to 12.6 % who think their MP did overclaim. In contrast, among those respondents whose MP was implicated, the corresponding proportions are 25.7 % and 30.1 % respectively. This still means that many people whose MP was implicated still believed he or she was innocent, but respondents were nevertheless more likely, by a magnitude of 17.5 percentage points, to think that their MP had overclaimed when the MP was publicly implicated in the scandal.

7.9 Regression analysis

Regression analysis can provide firmer evidence for the finding that constituent perceptions of MP conduct differ depending on whether the MP was publicly implicated in the scandal. We model our main dependent variable using multinomial logit since it has three response options (“overclaimed”, “did not overclaim” and “don’t know”). Standard errors are clustered by constituency to account for the fact that respondents are nested within parliamentary seats.

Our key explanatory variable is the measure of whether or not a respondent’s MP was implicated in the expenses scandal. We also control for a number of other variables that might plausibly influence respondent perceptions. The most important control variables measure partisan and MP-related voter predispositions. Here, the existence of the panel survey proves very useful: we can use respondents’ answers to items on previous waves to measure important political attitudes *before* the scandal broke, so these attitudes cannot have been influenced by the expenses scandal itself.

Our first control measures a respondent’s previous electoral support for their 2005–10 incumbent MP. It is coded as 1 if (in the 2005 post-election wave of the BES panel) the respondent reported voting for this MP at the 2005 General Election, and 0 otherwise. This variable is intended to proxy a respondent’s prior support towards the MP’s party as well as towards the individual MP.

Second, as a more direct measure of impact on an MP’s party, we control for whether a constituent identifies with the party of his or her 2005–10 incumbent MP. We code this binary

measure based on a respondent's answers to standard party ID items in the 2008 wave of the BES panel, the last wave before the scandal broke. This variable equals 1 if a respondent identifies with the party of their MP, and 0 otherwise.

Aside from controlling for respondent predispositions toward their MP, we also try to control for more general respondent characteristics that may influence their responses. We include variables that measure attention paid to politics and political knowledge, since higher levels of each should decrease the number of "don't know" responses. We include measures for general trust and political efficacy, since those who do not trust people in general and feel politically powerless might be more inclined to think their MP overclaimed.

We include two constituency-level variables. First, in order to control for the possibility that perceptions differ for representatives of each party, we control for the party affiliation of a respondent's MP with three dummy variables (Conservative, Liberal Democrat and other parties, with Labour as the reference category).⁴³ We also include a control for the notional size of the majority that the winning MP enjoyed in the respondent's constituency in 2005 (Rallings and Thrasher, 2007). The rationale for including the marginality variable is based on the theory that the tighter the race in the seat, the more incentive a constituent may have to become informed about the behaviour of their MP, and the more challenger candidates might try to insinuate wrongdoing on the part of an incumbent MP.

Finally, we also include a dummy variable that equals 1 when a respondent's 2005 constituency matches his or her 2010 constituency, and 0 otherwise.⁴⁴ The variable controls for the possibility that the respondent moved between 2005 and 2010 or that he or she was assigned a new

⁴³ Other survey evidence points to the fact that Liberal Democrat MPs were seen as less implicated by the scandal (YouGov 2009).

⁴⁴ This variable (seat change) was created by manually pairing up the 2005 and 2010 constituencies. In cases of boundary changes, 2005 constituencies were matched to successor constituencies. In most cases a successor constituency was identified when the incumbent ran again in a newly-formed constituency that contained part of his or her old constituency. In the remaining cases, we tried to match 2010 to 2005 constituencies based on the similarity of electorate. The 15 2010-defined seats that we did not match a 2005 constituency to were either entirely new seats or correspond to 2005-defined seats where a by-election occurred between 2005 and 2010.

incumbent MP due to boundary changes. While our dependent variable is based on a survey question fielded before the 2010 election, and therefore refers to a respondent's incumbent under the 2005 electoral boundaries, a respondent whose constituency was due to change under the re-drawn 2010 boundaries might be less sure of their MP's identity and therefore more likely to answer "don't know".⁴⁵

The key results are presented in Table 7.2. Model 1 only includes our main explanatory variable. Models 2 and 3 then add the series of controls described above, but vary in the measures of constituent predisposition toward an MP: in Model 2, we control for whether the constituent voted for the MP in the 2005 election whereas in Model 3 we also control for identification with the party of the MP.

These results provide strong evidence that constituents' perceptions regarding the propriety of their MP's expenses claims do respond to publicly available information. The negative and significant coefficients on the implicated variable across Models 1 to 3 indicate that a constituent whose MP was publicly implicated in the expenses scandal is more likely to think that his or her MP overclaimed (relative to either the "did not overclaim" or "don't know" response options), and that this result is robust to the inclusion of control variables.

⁴⁵ We also ran all models excluding all respondents who are in different seats in 2005 and 2010. All key findings are robust to this reduction of the sample.

Table 7.2: Predicting voter perceptions of MP behaviour

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	"did not overclaim" vs. "overclaimed"	"don't know" vs. "overclaimed"	"did not overclaim" vs. "overclaimed"	"don't know" vs. "overclaimed"	"did not overclaim" vs. "overclaimed"	"don't know" vs. "overclaimed"
Implicated	-1.33*** (0.14)	-0.92*** (0.13)	-1.41*** (0.16)	-1.05*** (0.15)	-1.43*** (0.16)	-1.12*** (0.15)
Voted for incumbent			0.77*** (0.12)	-0.02 (0.12)	0.63*** (0.14)	0.04 (0.14)
Party identification					0.29* (0.14)	-0.06 (0.14)
General trust			0.09** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.09** (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)
Political efficacy			0.07* (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Attention to politics			-0.07* (0.03)	-0.28*** (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.28*** (0.03)
Political knowledge			0.09* (0.05)	-0.10** (0.04)	0.09 (0.05)	-0.11** (0.04)
Seat change			-0.03 (0.16)	0.33* (0.14)	-0.08 (0.16)	0.30* (0.14)
Majority 2005			0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.003 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Conservative MP			-0.14 (0.15)	-0.16 (0.14)	-0.19 (0.16)	-0.22 (0.14)
Lib Dem MP			0.58* (0.25)	0.11 (0.24)	0.55* (0.26)	0.04 (0.24)
Other MP			0.56 (0.60)	0.69 (0.56)	0.31 (0.63)	0.24 (0.60)
Intercept	1.17*** (0.12)	1.30*** (0.11)	0.36 (0.32)	3.18*** (0.28)	0.38 (0.33)	3.31*** (0.28)
N	3218		2465		2305	
Pseudo-R ²	0.02		0.10		0.10	

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

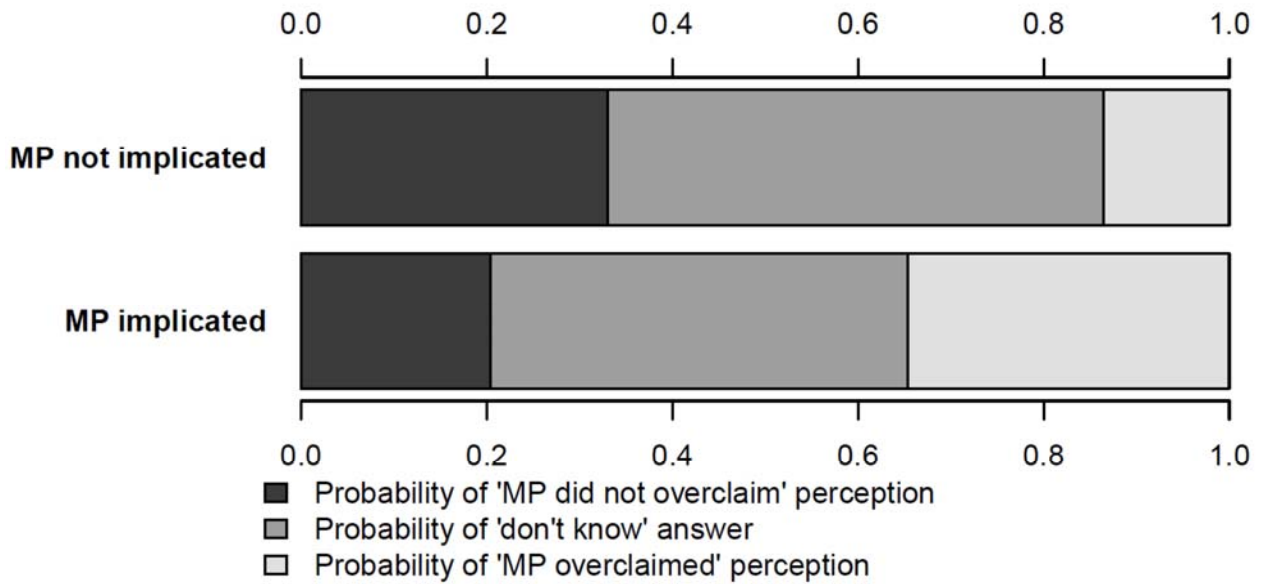
The control variables largely have the expected effects. For example, increasing general trust and political efficacy make a constituent more likely to think that their MP “did not overclaim” (relative to thinking the MP did overclaim), while increasing self-reported attention to politics and political knowledge make a “don’t know” response less likely. Interestingly, the coefficients also indicate that an increase in self-reported political attention also significantly increases a constituent’s probability of perceiving their MP to have “overclaimed” relative to “not overclaimed”. Finally, the coefficients on the MP’s party affiliation suggest that, all else equal, in 2010 Liberal Democrats were perceived as more honest with regard to their expenses claims than other MPs.⁴⁶

To interpret the magnitude of the effect of an MP’s implication in the expenses scandal on constituent perceptions, in Figure 7.1 we plot predicted probabilities based on Model 3. We hold all continuous variables at their mean and categorical variables at their mode. The top panel presents predicted probabilities for a constituent who did not vote for their MP in 2005 and did not identify with the MP’s party in 2008, and the bottom panel for a constituent who did both. The effect of a constituent’s MP being implicated in the scandal is surprisingly strong. For example, for voters in the top panel and whose MP is not implicated in the scandal, the probability of an “MP did not overclaim” perception is around 0.33 and that of an “MP did overclaim” perception is 0.14. In contrast, for voters with an MP implicated in the scandal, the equivalent numbers are 0.20 and 0.35 respectively. This is a clear reversal of relative perceptions among those with an opinion on their MP’s behaviour. The change in the predicted probabilities is very similar for voters who voted for their MP in 2005 and who identified with their MP’s party in 2008 (bottom panel). Given the general belief that voters in Britain know little about their representatives the effect of publicly available information is much stronger than one might have expected.

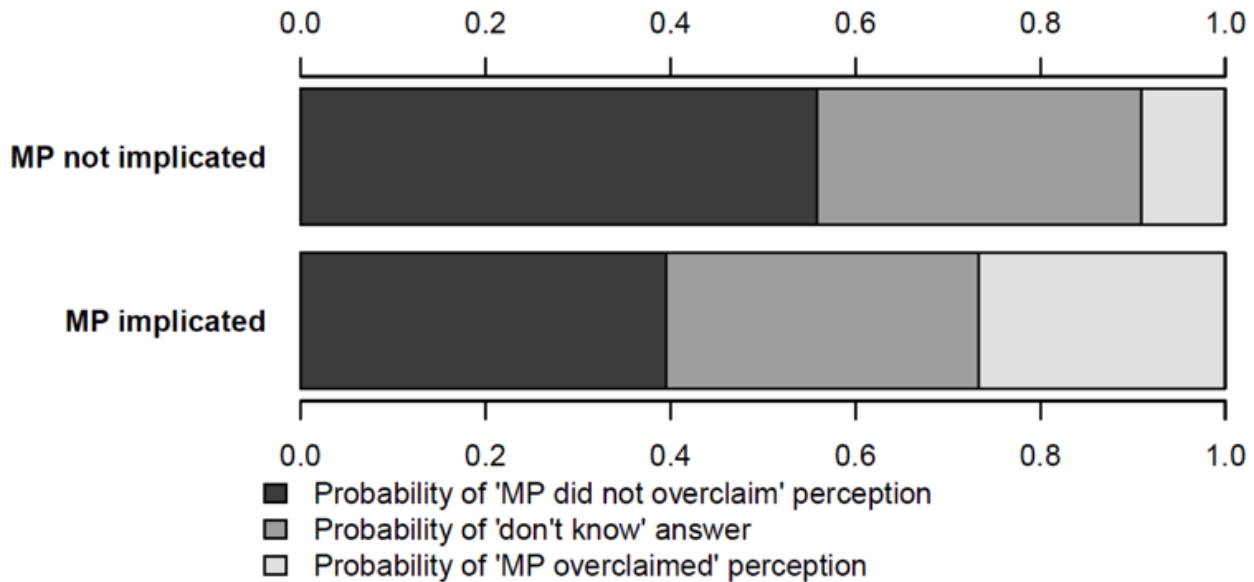
⁴⁶ We also ran models with appropriate interaction terms to check whether the effect of wrongdoing on perceptions thereof depended on the party affiliation of the MP or on the marginality of the constituency. We find no evidence for either type of conditionality.

Figure 7.1: Voter perceptions of whether MPs claimed excessive expenses

a. Did not vote for MP and does not identify with MP's party



b. Did vote for MP and does identify with MP's party



Note: Based on Model 3, Table 7.2. Panel (a) holds 2005 vote for MP and party identification with MP's party at 'no', panel (b) at 'yes'. All other variables held at their means (continuous variables) or modes (indicator variables).

Yet it is not the case that constituent perceptions of MPs' misconduct are overwhelmingly accurate. First, Table 7.1 shows that a large proportion of voters simply do not know whether their MP was involved in the expenses scandal or not, or at the very least do not feel certain in their beliefs. Second, voter predispositions toward their MP are also very important in determining voter perceptions of MP misbehaviour. The estimates for Model 3 (Table 7.2) show that having voted for the MP and identifying with the MP's party increase the probability of thinking that one's MP did not overclaim. The two panels of Figure 7.1 help us to understand the predicted differences. For example, where an MP is not implicated in the scandal, a typical constituent who voted for that MP and identifies with the MP's party is expected to think that the MP "did not overclaim" with a probability of 0.56, whereas the equivalent estimate is 0.33 for a constituent who did not vote for the MP and does not identify with the MP's party. Similarly, where an MP was implicated in the scandal, a constituent who voted for the MP and identifies with the MP's party is 20 points more likely to maintain that their MP did not overclaim than a constituent who neither voted for the MP nor identified with the MP's party. In summary, voters' predispositions towards MPs are as influential in determining perceptions of misconduct as whether or not an MP was publicly implicated in the scandal.

7.10 Perceptions of misconduct and constituent vote choice: data and analysis

Do constituents then sanction MPs they perceive to have overclaimed? To answer this question, we test whether a constituent is less likely to vote for an incumbent MP at the 2010 general election if they believe that he or she overclaimed in the expenses scandal.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Our focus is on incumbent MPs as we are interested in accountability for misbehaviour. However, even new replacement candidates could face negative electoral consequences if voters decide to sanction them for their predecessor's wrongdoing or if their predecessor's behaviour also shapes perceptions of his or her replacement.

Of course, not all 2005–10 incumbent MPs stood for re-election in 2010, and boundary changes introduced at the 2010 election further complicate the picture. Because we are interested in whether constituents use their votes to hold their incumbent representatives electorally accountable for perceived misconduct, for this part of the analysis we restrict our sample to those respondents who were located in a 2010-defined constituency where a sitting MP ran for re-election in 2010, and who had been represented by that MP between 2005–10.⁴⁸

Are voters who think their MP overclaimed more likely to vote for an opposing candidate?⁴⁹ Our dependent variable here is a binary measure that equals 1 if the respondent voted for the incumbent MP at the 2010 general election, and 0 if he or she voted for another candidate. This variable is coded based on a respondent's self-reported vote choice in the 2010 post-election wave of the BES panel. Since our dependent variable is dichotomous, we use binary logistic regression, again clustering standard errors by constituency. Because of the attrition that arises due to the use of an extra panel wave, and the restriction of the sample to respondents with an incumbent MP re-running in 2010 who also voted in the election, our overall sample size here is reduced to 1134.

7.11 Analysis

Our main explanatory variable of interest is the categorical measure of whether or not a respondent believed that their incumbent MP was guilty of overclaiming on expenses, or whether they did not know. This enters our regression as two dummy variables: one for the “don't know” category and one for the “overclaimed” category, with the “did not overclaim” perception as the baseline. A potential complication here is that, as we have already shown, respondents who are

⁴⁸ We would be underestimating voter sanctioning of misconduct if the worst offenders had resigned before the election. However, as noted above even among the most consistently implicated MPs, more than half chose to run again (Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming), so focusing on re-standing MPs should not make our estimates strongly unrepresentative.

⁴⁹ It may also be that voters who think their MP overclaimed would be more likely to abstain, especially if they would prefer to support the party of that MP. However, we cannot carry out useful analyses of turnout decisions with our data because self-reported turnout is very high, partly as a consequence of our focus on panel data. Unfortunately, validated vote data is only available for the BES pre- and post-election face-to-face survey data.

predisposed toward their incumbent MP (either for MP-specific or partisan reasons) are less likely to perceive that MP to have overclaimed on expenses, but these predispositions are also likely to influence vote choice. To deal with this, we again take advantage of the panel nature of our data and control for a respondent's predisposition toward their MP as measured prior to our expenses perceptions variable. Thus, in Model 4 (Table 7.3) we control for whether, at the 2005 election, a respondent voted for their 2005–10 incumbent MP. This captures the prior electoral behaviour of the voter and means that we are essentially testing whether perceptions of misconduct led to vote switching. Furthermore, in Model 5 we include a further control for whether the respondent identified with the party of their incumbent MP when surveyed in 2008. In both models we also account for differential partisan swings at the 2010 election by including dummies indicating the party affiliation of a respondent's MP.⁵⁰

As the estimates for Models 4 and 5 show (Table 7.3), both of our measures of respondent predisposition toward an MP are strongly positively associated with voting for an incumbent MP.⁵¹ Nevertheless, while the coefficient on the “don't know” dummy variable is not significant, the coefficient on the “overclaimed” dummy variable is both significant and negative. This provides strong evidence that when a constituent perceived their MP to have made improper expenses claims, they were less likely to support that MP at election time.

To gauge the magnitude of this effect, we present predicted probabilities based on Model 5 for two types of respondents in Figure 7.2.

⁵⁰ We also tried including three constituency-level variables: the length of time the MP has been in Parliament; whether the MP sat on the Government or opposition frontbench; and the (notional) majority won by the MP in 2005. Since none of these variables proved to be significant predictors, we omit them from the models presented.

⁵¹ Our sample size changes between Models 4 and 5 because we include different predictors in each model and these predictors have different numbers of missing observations.

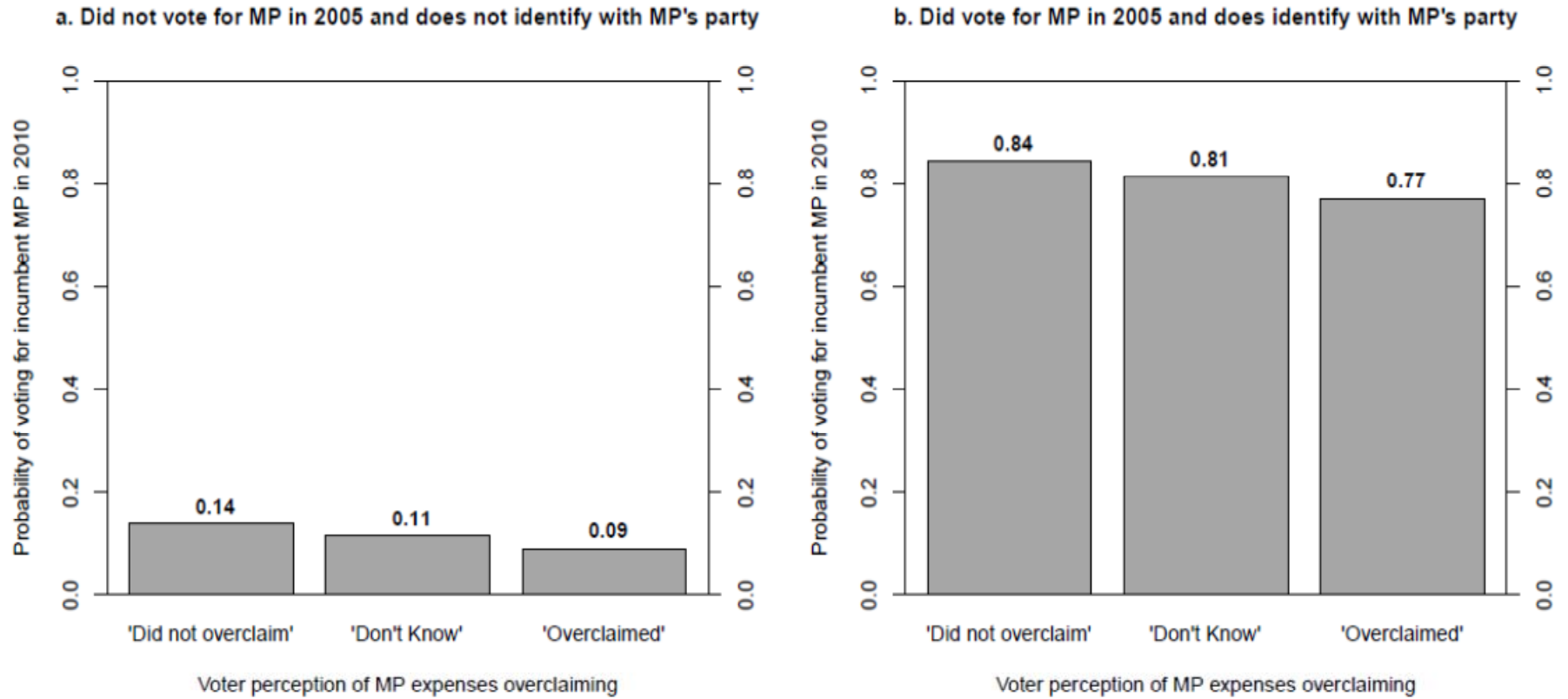
Table 7.3: Constituent perceptions and vote choice

	Model 4	Model 5
<i>Perception of MP overclaiming</i>		
(Reference: Did not overclaim)		
Don't know	-0.19 (0.18)	-0.20 (0.19)
Overclaimed	-0.50* (0.21)	-0.47* (0.24)
Voted for incumbent	2.65*** (0.16)	1.92*** (0.19)
Party identification		1.62*** (0.20)
Conservative MP	0.33* (0.16)	0.48** (0.18)
Liberal Democrat MP	0.27 (0.25)	0.65* (0.26)
Other MP	-0.15 (0.76)	-0.21 (0.88)
Intercept	-1.46*** (0.19)	-1.86*** (0.20)
N	1134	1076
Pseudo-R ²	0.41	0.47

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05

The left panel shows the probability of voting for the incumbent MP for a respondent who did not vote for that MP in 2005 and who does not identify with the MP's party. For these voters, a perception of guilt reduces the probability of voting for the incumbent by five points, from 0.14 to 0.09. The right panel shows the same probabilities for voters who identify with the MP's party and voted for him or her in 2005. The overall predicted probabilities are much higher, but the decline due to a perception of an MP overclaiming is similar at seven points (from 0.84 to 0.77). Furthermore, ninety-five per cent confidence intervals (not graphed here) indicate that the marginal effects on vote choice of moving from a "did not overclaim" to an "overclaimed" perception are significant for both types of voters.

Figure 7.2: Perceptions of misconduct and vote choice



Note: Based on Model 5, Table 7.3. Panel (a) holds 2005 vote for MP and party identification with MP's party at 'no', panel (b) at 'yes'. All other variables held at their means (continuous variables) or modes (indicator variables).

There is therefore evidence that at the 2010 General Election, British voters acted to sanction MPs electorally for perceived overclaiming on expenses.⁵² Considering that perceived implication in the scandal is just one of many possible characteristics of an MP, a reduction in the probability of voting for a candidate of five points is certainly not a trivial one. However, the link between perceptions and vote choice is not nearly as strong and as certain as the estimated link between information and perceptions. In other words, perceptions of MP misconduct are only weakly translated into voting behaviour.

7.12 Concluding remarks

Through our examination of the UK expenses scandal, we show that accountability for representative misconduct functions in the UK, but only imperfectly. Regarding the exposure–perceptions link, we find that voter perceptions of their MP’s conduct do reflect whether their MP was publicly involved in the expenses scandal or not. Yet, the link is not perfect: almost half the voters do not know and do not even try to guess whether their MP was involved in the scandal or not. Moreover, voter perceptions are influenced just as strongly by their predispositions than by actual information.

Turning to the perceptions–sanction link, we find that some voters punish their MP when they perceive them to have misbehaved. A perception that an incumbent MP overclaimed on expenses was associated with a predicted decline of around five per cent in the probability of voting for him or her. These results indicate that, at the margin, MPs are accountable for perceived misconduct by their constituents. Yet, the perceptions–sanction link is not nearly as strong and clear as that between exposure and perception: constituent perceptions do not translate into electoral punishment as much as might have been expected given the impact of scandal exposure on these perceptions.

This research design has allowed us to identify whether accountability for misconduct works,

⁵² As Curtice et al. (2010) show, there is evidence of this at the aggregate level as well.

and if not, why it fails. Our evidence points to the fact that there are problems in both the perception and the sanction steps of the sequence. However, what is most striking is the weakness of the link between perceptions of misconduct and sanction. This weakness supports the general message that UK voters do not hold individual MPs electorally accountable for misbehaviour, as also demonstrated in the analysis of controversies in the 1997 and 2010 general elections. The analysis of the expenses scandal takes this finding one step further in that we can directly identify the perceptions link in the chain. This therefore solidifies the argument that there is a definitive disconnect in the chain of accountability where voters absorb information about controversies, but then do not act upon their perception of the event by holding MPs to account at the election.

The likely explanation is that the electoral institutions are important. The UK's institutional set-up incentivises constituents to see their vote as one between parties and not between potential representatives, which could mean that voters simply do not try to become informed about their MP's behaviour. However, we have shown that this is only part of the story: despite the institutional limitations, voters do become informed about their representatives although they frequently fail to act on this information. There is room to argue that some of the controversies analysed for the 1997 and 2010 elections were not, overall, the type of issue that the electorate would hold against an MP. However, the expenses scandal is an unequivocal example of misconduct for many MPs. The lack of electoral sanction in this case implies a true break in the chain of accountability as perceptions are clearly shown to have been updated based on information about the scandal. It follows that elections in Britain used as an accountability mechanism to punish MP behaviour and that the institutional framework further hinders this process. If electoral accountability for misconduct is the goal, it is absolutely necessary that voters are provided with information about misconduct and that they update beliefs based on this information, but we also need to choose institutional frameworks that allow voters to use that information to guide their vote choice.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

8.1 The accountability chain at work

Politicians today are more humanised than ever before. The public has an impression of their personalities. Their interests are well known. Their trials and tribulations are put on display for general consumption, treated as if they are owned by the public that put them in office in the first place. Though the electorate did put them in power and are entitled to be kept aware of any major issues, politicians are subjected to a tremendous level of media intrusion (Deacon, 2004).

The bad always comes with the good: the ‘top-notch’ minister has cheated on his wife; the supposedly loyal backbencher has led an unexpected rebellion; and the former cabinet minister has taken illegal campaign donations. We know that nobody’s perfect and no one should be expected to be. The human capacity to forgive (though perhaps not to forget) was made to measure against our capacity to make mistakes and they both seem to be vast. However, with the exposure the electorate sometimes endures, they must now decide how much forgiveness to give. Answering that question is a process whose reasoning is only in its infancy given how much it is provoked by an active media. There will be energetic debate on politicians’ mistakes and appropriate reactions on small and large scales, and our mechanism for punishment is informed by so many different factors that the reactions will vary and attitudes will shift.

Our access to and interest in information that is both relevant and irrelevant to an MP’s job description and performance means that it is incredibly difficult for an MP to get away from a story. The salacious and entertaining stories interest the public and are easy to digest in big headlines. Understanding what types of behaviour deserve and receive punishment and which are of little consequence is the crux of this research.

While our objective minds can separate the salacious from the salient, they are in many cases inexorably linked in the retelling of the tale. The inclusion of details that are often completely

divorced from metrics of the ability of the politician in question to do his or her job is prominent in news stories. Competency is therefore far from the only criterion that politicians are judged on; instead, we are shown the full package. In turn, we have updated the way in which we consume news to include these details. Consciously or not, news stories have become an integral part of the way in which we judge politicians and their performance, which has and will continue to change the way we view our representatives, the way they conduct themselves in order to stay in office and what will be done in response to controversies.

These developments were the major drivers of this research. Not only were newspapers used as the main data source, but also the content of those newspaper stories shaped the methodological parameters of the research. A thorough investigation of the regular substance of political news articles suggests that the variety of topics covered are important to consider in an analysis of the effects of individual MPs' actions and behaviours on their political careers. It is from this examination that the notion of using political controversies to evaluate MPs was developed – a range of issues that are different in substance, but share the quality that they all garnered negative news attention that could damage an MP's reputation within their political party and/or in the public eye.

The potential for an individual MP's actions to actually affect his or her political future is impacted, and in many cases, hindered by the institutional design of the Westminster system. The strength of party politics in Britain is well documented and supported by the findings in this research, and party identification is a powerful factor in vote choice especially as voters are only given one vote to elect both an MP and a government. By design, and despite single member districts, British elections are primarily fought as national contests between parties rather than local contests between individual candidates like in US Congressional elections. In this setting, finding any individual accountability mechanism implies discovering a new feature of British politics.

In order to look at this puzzle closely, this research identifies a small but important and growing space being carved out in British politics where the individuality of politicians is having an

effect. The personalities of party leaders and some high profile politicians are hot topics, featured in elections that now include televised debates. Traditional voting paradigms defined predominantly by social class have been shown to be on the decline and the design of single member districts provides a setting where political representatives and their constituents are, technically, closely linked. These factors, coupled with increasing voraciousness of the press in seeking out stories, make it an opportune time to examine the impact of individual MPs' actions and characteristics in order to gauge whether or not there is a tangible effect of the unique profiles of MPs on their fates.

This research approaches the assessment of MP behaviours on their careers through an analysis of varying types of political accountability. It is possible for an MP's behaviour to have an effect on a number of different levels. Once the action has been exposed, usually by the media, it is then absorbed and a perception of the event is formed. This is the first step in the accountability chain. Before election day, an MP may be subject to internal sanction by his or her party or a retirement by personal choice. An MP being pushed towards retirement represents the presence of an accountability mechanism in the system – MPs are held responsible for their actions, even if not at the polls. It also shows a concern on the part of political parties to police themselves and further shows their attitudes towards the relative severity of political controversies. The final frontier in the accountability chain is electoral sanction when citizens get the opportunity to make electoral decisions based on their perception of an MP's actions.

This chain is useful in that it allows for nuance in the concept of accountability. While a more traditional thinker might see sanctioning as the only legitimate version of being held accountable, being able to identify individual actions affecting the perception of an MP is highly significant. Especially in a system like Britain's, the updating of perceptions sheds light on the notion that the electorate is generally inattentive to politics and perhaps doesn't even know who their MP is.

This thesis has shown evidence of the perceptions and internal sanction steps in the accountability chain and a weak gesture towards electoral sanction in the expenses scandal. The case

for the existence of internal sanction is made through the results of binary logistic regression to predict the likelihood of retiring in both 1997 and 2010. In both elections, MPs who had controversies were more likely to stand down than their 'clean' counterparts. The effect was strong, increasing in magnitude to 35 % for Labour MPs who had a controversy within a year of the election in 2010.

It must be noted that the effect does not hold for the main opposition party overall. The data suggests that parties fighting to stay in power and facing a predicted swing to the opposition engage in internal sanctioning behaviour. Opposition MPs appear to generally forge ahead free of concern for the effect of controversies. While there is also a strong effect of age on the odds of an MP standing down, having had a controversy leads to higher increases in the probability of retiring. Whether completely the MP's choice or in collaboration with the party, the relationship between controversy and retirement is strong enough to suggest the plausibility of a genuine and active internal sanctioning mechanism.

In respect to having an accountable British government, this result, regardless of the cause for retirement, is good news. Controversy makes very little difference in explaining the change in MPs' vote share from the previous election. This holds for regressions estimating the effect in constituencies that had no boundary changes and also for those that underwent alterations. In 1997 and 2010, there was no electoral sanction for MPs who had a controversy and those MPs who did stand again were, therefore, not held to account for the actions analysed here. Even though many did not re-stand, the election results are largely attributable to the fact that other issues were clearly more salient to the electorate.

The political controversies used as an explanatory variable in the examination of the 1997 and 2010 general elections are varied. Some may be the type of issue the average person wouldn't expect a politician to be punished for and others not. It was always going to be a largely subjective exercise. It follows that it was useful to look further into the possibility of individual MP accountability by

using a fine-grained and precise event – a definitive scandal. The 2009–2010 expenses scandal is an excellent example of such an event. In our analysis, we find the existence of both an exposure-perception and perceptions–sanction link, but with the former much stronger. By utilising a unique measure of MP implication in the scandal and three waves of the BES study, it can be seen that citizens’ perceptions of their MP’s involvement in the scandal directly relates to whether or not they were publicly exposed as such. While there are a great number of voters who did not know whether their MP was involved, the link between MP exposure and constituent perception was strong. The process of updating voter perceptions based on information about MPs demonstrates that voters know more about their MPs than many think.

In some cases, voters sanctioned their MP. MPs implicated in the scandal were estimated to have lost around one and a half extra percentage points at the polls in aggregate assessments (Curtice et al., 2010; Eggers and Fischer, 2011; Pattie and Johnston, forthcoming) and voters with a perception that their incumbent MP had overclaimed were five per cent less likely to vote for them at the 2010 election. Though this result is marginal, it shows that MPs are held accountable for perceived misconduct, at least in the mind of a voter. Therefore, there seems to be a disconnect between these updated perceptions and the ability of voters to actually punish their MP based on their beliefs about conduct. This step in the accountability chain is not functioning properly.

We can never know with absolute certainty what the perception of the controversies analysed in this research were for either party members or the general public. However, I believe it is fair to say that political parties do not like rebellion. No one likes adultery and no one likes financial impropriety either. The BES survey analysis requires no guesswork: no one likes overclaiming on expenses, at least if they know about it. The effect of the expenses scandal on reported vote choice is encouraging in that it signals a thought process that leads to sanction. However, the sanctioning step is still not working properly. With all the anger, outrage and feelings of broken trust that the public

levies at politicians they still, on the whole, do not use elections as an accountability mechanism for these types of behaviours.

8.2 Individual and party level accountability in Britain

This research is about dissecting the relationship between media reporting, public opinion and MP actions. Overall, the results suggest that an MP's individual behaviour is an issue dealt with internally, either by direction of the party or personal choice. The evidence does not suggest that voters use elections to "throw the rascals out" as it were. While the findings from the expenses scandal analysis show that voters do, indeed, update their perceptions based on coverage of MP behaviour, they still do little about it when actually given the chance to formally sanction them.

It therefore appears that Britain's current institutional framework does not leave much room for voters to use the information that they amass about individual MP's actions during the election period to guide their vote choice. Instead they have negative perceptions that they carry into the next term. This is more disturbing than analyses where information about politicians is argued to be too costly to collect. While many MPs who have had controversies retire before the election, evidence of a weak perceptions-to-electoral sanction link explicitly demonstrates that constituents view their vote as between two rival parties and not between rival representatives, no matter what their personal beliefs about the quality of the politician are.

I accept that there are often more pressing issues than which MP had an affair or who overclaimed on their expenses at election time. However, it is both the personal character of those in the political class and the professional decisions that they make that upset the electorate and lead to declines in trust levels. As the combined weight of these two components have seriously affected public sentiment towards government and the perception of its competency as a whole, the limited effect of individual actions of MPs on electoral outcomes is striking.

If democratic government relies on the trust pact between politicians and their constituents and politicians are perceived not to be living up to their side of the pact, then some form of consequence should result. What outcome fits what transgression or controversy will be an important subject of debate of its own. If representatives take their posts to be a privilege, then the breach of their constituents' trust should mean forfeiting the privilege to represent them. However, the centralised party structure and the electoral system create a political environment where perceptions about individual politicians are often overridden by considerations of party choice or other pressing issues.

With all of the above taken into consideration, political parties are still not becoming significantly more decentralised. Further, if partisan voting behaviour is genuinely weakening as the literature argues, it is going to be a very long process. It follows that for the final step in the accountability chain, electoral sanction, to become a substantial part of British politics its institutional framework needs tweaking. British voters are exposed to a lot of negative news about their representatives and they are not given very much recourse. In turn, it seems out of order that an electoral system design influences citizens vis-à-vis what criterion they base their vote choice on. If an MP has behaved improperly in the eyes of the voters but remains the candidate at the next election, a voter faces a difficult dilemma in choosing between the party they support and the representative they feel they can no longer support.

As we saw through the referendum on the voting system in May 2011, the attachment to the Westminster system runs deep and a majority are defensive of its long-lasting traditional democratic values. That said, the system in its current form seems unequipped to solve many of their problems. How can you change a political culture if your vote for or against your direct representative carries with it the much heavier burden of being a *de facto* choice for a whole government? This research will hopefully encourage more research, study and conversation about how to move politics and government closer to a higher level of accountability. A reasonable process for people to express

their views electorally would logically mean more direct accountability, more engagement on the part of the public and improvements in the responsiveness of government. Hopefully, with such a change in the climate, the *trust vortex* will diminish in size over time.

8.3 Further research

This research provides insight into the ways in which political controversy and scandal affect MPs' careers and the implications for individual level political accountability in Britain. While it does contribute to the field in its own right, there are other studies that would provide added understanding to the issues raised here.

The most logical extension of this research would be to create a comparable dataset of political controversies in another country. As the literature on the personal vote most often compares the relationship between elected representatives and constituents in the US and the UK, the US would be an excellent test for the impact of controversy on political careers. These findings would add to the analyses of political accountability in parliamentary versus presidential systems as well as highlight differences in the way that the media works in the US. Other countries that would provide an excellent means of comparison with the UK and US include Italy and Japan, where there is already strong interest in the impact of scandal on legislative careers.

An important element of the findings presented here is the relationship between political controversy and an MP's decision to retire. Though this paper isolated a strong and significant effect of political controversy it is not possible to pinpoint the exact reason an MP retired through regression analysis. It follows that a series of interviews with MPs who have been involved in controversies would be a tremendous addition to this field. These interviews would ideally proffer insight into the role that political parties play in the management of controversies, MPs' perspective on the impact of the media in the fallout from a controversy and the true reasons behind why they

retired. While MPs are frequently quoted in the press, in-depth interviews would certainly shed greater light on the impact of political controversy on an MP's retirement decision.

Another potential avenue for further research would be to examine the mitigation strategies that individual MPs employed in the fallout from the 2009–2010 expenses scandal. The newspaper coverage surrounding the scandal would provide a guide to the various responses MPs gave to being implicated in the scandal. These responses could be categorised broadly: whether or not an MP made any comment, denied any wrongdoing or accepted responsibility and/or apologised and could be used in regression analysis to predict retirement or voter perception of misbehaviour vis-à-vis the scandal. A sample could also be analysed qualitatively and provide insights into the various methods by which MPs address their involvement in a highly publicised scandal as well as which approaches succeed or fail in mitigating the negative effects of the scandal.

Finally, it would be interesting to further analyse the implications of scandal on the political system by looking at its effect on democratic satisfaction. One could measure whether a particularly scandal-ridden parliament led to lower levels of satisfaction with the regime and the system generally. This would hopefully indicate whether scandals have an effect on the political system even if voters do not punish MPs for individual misbehaviours at the polls. It would also be useful to look at turnout levels in constituencies where the MP was implicated in a controversy or the expenses scandal versus those where the MP was untainted. Lower turnout could then be analysed as a proxy for low satisfaction with the system or a sort of protest vote against the political culture.

As demonstrated above there are a number of ways in which the research presented in this thesis could be extended. The main findings indicate that there is a relationship between political controversy and an MP's retirement, but that the electoral sanction step in the chain of accountability does not function as well as one would expect. It follows that pursuing these studies would help to further elucidate the relationship between an individual MP's behaviour and political accountability in Britain.

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Appendix A

Standing down – all constituencies 2010

	All MPs	Labour MPs	Conservative MPs
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Controversy	0.20 (0.29)	0.43 (0.36)	-0.24 (0.81)
In Government	-0.31 (0.26)	-0.47 (0.30)	
Frontbench	-1.34*** (0.41)		-1.04+ (0.58)
Lib Dem Frontbench	-0.99+ (0.53)		
Age	0.08*** (0.01)	0.07*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.04)
Marginality	-0.14 (0.27)	0.35 (0.31)	-1.34+ (0.74)
Implicated Expenses	0.27 (0.23)	0.17 (0.27)	0.90 (0.58)
Gender	-0.25 (0.26)	-0.02 (0.29)	-1.35* (0.65)
Lawyer	-0.47 (0.35)	-0.45 (0.56)	-0.53 (0.55)
Oxbridge	0.43+ (0.24)	0.41 (0.33)	0.62 (0.50)
Controversy*Marginality	0.52 (0.60)	-0.34 (0.71)	2.24+ (1.33)
Intercept	-5.55*** (0.96)	-4.83*** (1.15)	-9.19*** (2.71)
N	618	340	191
Pseudo-R ²	0.14	0.08	0.35

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1

Appendix B

Standing down controversy under one year – all constituencies 1997

	All MPs	Conservative MPs	Labour MPs
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Controversy under 1 year	0.99+ (0.59)	1.12+ (0.61)	0.49 (2.04)
In Government	0.16 (0.30)	-0.26 (0.34)	
Frontbench	-0.75+ (0.44)		-0.60 (0.59)
Age	0.17*** (0.02)	0.15*** (0.02)	0.25*** (0.04)
Marginality	0.27 (0.33)	0.58 (0.41)	-0.53 (0.85)
Gender	1.17* (0.57)	1.48+ (0.78)	0.91 (0.91)
Lawyer	0.26 (0.36)	-0.08 (0.43)	0.79 (0.67)
Oxbridge	-0.05 (0.27)	0.17 (0.33)	-1.10+ (0.58)
Under 1 year*Marginality	0.97 (0.84)	0.48 (0.91)	
Intercept	-12.42*** (1.32)	-11.28*** (1.77)	-16.91*** (2.92)
N	627	323	261
Pseudo-R ²	0.26	0.23	0.41

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, +p<0.1