

## **PUBLIC OPINIONS OF THE IMPEACHMENT OF PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON: A LOOK BACK**

Carl E. Enomoto  
Nancy Baker

*New Mexico State University  
New Mexico State University*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The purpose of this paper is to determine how gender, party affiliation, political views, age, race, education, income, attendance at religious services, and other such variables affected public opinions of President Clinton shortly after the release of the Starr report (and before the impeachment vote in the House of Representatives). Using data from a CBS NEWS / NEW YORK TIMES poll taken from September 12 to September 15, 1998, this study found the following: 1) Age had an effect on opinions concerning the Clinton scandal with younger individuals more likely to want the impeachment process to begin. This information provides some support for the Life-experience hypothesis. 2) Women were more likely to want Clinton to resign and less likely to want impeachment, which is perhaps consistent with the strong support Clinton had from women voters in the 1996 election. 3) Those with more education and income were more likely to want Clinton to resign and less likely to want impeachment, which is consistent with the resource hypothesis. 4) The combination of all attributes and individual characteristics determine how final opinions are established concerning resignation, impeachment, and dropping the matter.*

**JEL Classification Codes:** D72

**Key words:** *Public Opinion; impeachment; President William Jefferson Clinton*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

On January 17, 1998, President William Jefferson Clinton testified in the Paula Jones trial and denied having sexual relations with a White House intern, Monica Lewinsky. On August 17 of the same year, the president again testified, this time before Kenneth Starr's grand jury. That night President Clinton addressed the nation and stated that he had been involved in an inappropriate affair.

On September 11, 1998, Kenneth Starr and the Office of the Independent Council submitted a 455-page report to the House Judiciary Committee, outlining eleven impeachable offenses that the president was being accused of. The Judiciary Committee which consisted of twenty-one Republicans and sixteen Democrats, reduced and revised these to four allegations that were then voted on: article one "alleges that on Aug. 17, 1998, William Jefferson Clinton willfully provided perjurious, false and misleading testimony before Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's grand jury"; article two "alleges that the president willfully provided perjurious, false and misleading

testimony in sworn, written answers and videotaped testimony in Paula Jones's civil rights lawsuit"; article three "alleges that the president prevented, obstructed, and impeded justice"; article four "alleges that the president willfully made perjurious, false and misleading sworn statements to Congress in response to written requests that were part of an impeachment inquiry." All of the Republicans on the Judiciary Committee voted in favor of articles one, three, and four, while the Democrats voted against them. Article two passed with twenty Republican votes in its favor and seventeen votes against it, one of which was a Republican vote (Fineman, 1998). The four articles of impeachment were then submitted to the entire House of Representatives for consideration.

On December 19, 1998, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to impeach President Clinton and approved articles one and three; articles two and four failed. The president was being impeached for trying to conceal an adulterous affair.

The trial moved on to the Senate. On February 12, 1999, President Clinton was acquitted of the charges before him. On the charge of perjury (article 1 of impeachment), there were fifty-five votes against convicting of perjury (45 Democrats and 10 Republicans) and 45 for convicting of perjury (all Republicans). On the charge of obstruction of justice (article 3 of impeachment), there were fifty votes against the charge of obstruction (all 45 Democrats and 5 Republicans) and fifty votes in favor of the charge of obstruction (all Republicans). A two-thirds majority vote was needed in the Senate on an article of impeachment to remove the president from office (Fineman 1999).

Public opinion was sharply divided. Many thought that President Clinton was not as apologetic regarding the affair as he should have been. Some individuals thought that he should resign while others believed that his actions did not rise to the level of "high crimes and misdemeanors" that the framers of the Constitution set forth as impeachable offenses. Furthermore, an examination of the votes in the House of Representatives and in the Senate provided evidence to some that the issues involved were partisan in nature.

Ann Coulter (1998), an attorney for the Center for Individual Rights, stated the following concerning the Clinton scandal:

Lying to the American people may not be a criminal offense, but it is a breach of trust by the president. It is a "high crime or misdemeanor." It is unquestionably an impeachable offense. As [Alexander] Hamilton suggested, the president could be impeached for acts that make him "unworthy of being any longer trusted," even if immune from "legal punishment." (pg. 305)

Of course, there are opposing opinions. Alan Dershowitz (1998, 218-219), a Professor of Law at Harvard Law School, stated the following:

But even if what the President is accused of doing were to be deemed a crime, it is not the sort of "high" crime or misdemeanor the framers had in mind when they established the criteria for impeachment.

One of President Clinton's harshest critics was William J. Bennett, who served as Secretary of Education and Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities under President Ronald Reagan. Bennett (1998, 129) stated

...I cannot shake the thought that the widespread loss of outrage against this president's misconduct tells us something fundamentally important about our condition. Our commitment to long-standing American ideals has been enervated. We desperately need to recover them, and soon. They are under assault.

Bennett believed that the Clinton scandal provided the nation with a view of itself. It was an opportunity to evaluate where we stood in our politics, morals and ethics. It was a time to examine what we believed was right or wrong and to decide what we wanted for our future.

As varied as public opinions were of the Clinton scandal, it is also interesting to note the differences in opinions concerning Clinton's job as president and Clinton's personal values. In a *Wall Street Journal*/NBC News poll taken right after the release of the Starr report, 73% rated Clinton poorly in terms of ethical and moral values while 10% gave him a favorable rating. When evaluating Clinton's job performance, 66% approved of Clinton's job as president while 31% disapproved (Duff, 1998).

Pious (1998) stated that the polls showed the public approved of the president's job performance and policies but disliked his character. One explanation Pious gave for this discrepancy is that the public disliked the mass media coverage involved and disliked the way the media handled its coverage of the impeachment. Another explanation offered by Pious was that the public is so cynical about politicians that nothing about their behavior comes as a surprise. He also stated that it is possible that the public has become so inundated with sexually explicit material it is no longer affected by the sexual indiscretions of others.

Cronin and Genovese (1998) also discussed possible reasons why people approved of the job performance of President Clinton but disapproved of his social life. They stated that the public does not believe adultery should be a reason for removing a president from office.

Newman (2003) gave reasons why individuals' assessments of the president's integrity might and might not affect their evaluations of his job performance. He concluded that integrity assessments did affect Clinton's job approval ratings.

Many polls have also been taken to see what percent of the public wanted to see the president impeached or wanted him to resign. Who are the people who wanted President Clinton out of office, and who were his supporters? Superficial assessments of the polling data have noted the impact of partisanship, ideology, religious activism, and other demographic factors on public attitudes regarding impeachment, resignation, or moving on. Yet these factors do not operate in isolation from one another. Through a logit analysis of polling data taken in the aftermath of the release of the Starr Report in September 1998, this study seeks to draw a more nuanced portrait of the individuals

who might support impeachment, resignation or moving on. Furthermore, by identifying the political groups and constituencies that are most sensitive to presidential indiscretions and moral turpitude, those with political aspirations can direct their attention, policies, and resources, to gain acceptance from these groups.

While other studies have analyzed public opinion polls during the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal such as Bennett, S.E. (2002), Renshon (2002), Pious (1998), Cronin and Genovese (1998), and Newman (2003), the focus has been on why the public supported the president but not his behavior. What these studies have not examined is how individual characteristics and traits affected public opinions of President Clinton concerning impeachment, resignation, and dropping the matter. This study directly addresses these issues.

Even today, President George W. Bush faces controversy and opposition regarding same sex marriage issues, pro-life issues, and stem cell research. While these issues are different from the Lewinsky scandal faced by President Clinton, they involve moral issues and opinions which may be related to the age, religious background, race, party affiliation, income, and education of the public. An analysis of how these demographic, political, and social characteristics help shape public opinion concerning moral issues may help us better understand how the public has reacted to political events in the past and how it will react to political events in the future. Indeed, the impeachment of President Clinton had some similarities (although many differences as well) to the Nixon impeachment. Altshuler (2000, 746) stated that in 1974 the House Judiciary Committee found that President Nixon had used federal agencies to “undermine his political opponents and obstruct government investigations...to warrant his impeachment”. In 1998 the House Judiciary committee concluded that President Clinton’s lying under oath and concealing a private relationship were an obstruction of justice and impeachable offenses.

The outline of this paper is as follows: in the next section, a theory of political participation (rational actor model) will be presented; it provides several testable hypotheses concerning the formation of public opinions of President Clinton. A discussion of the data and methodology used in this study will then be presented, followed by a section containing the empirical results. The conclusions and a summary will be given in the final section.

## **2. RATIONAL ACTOR MODEL**

One of the most influential theories in political science is rational choice theory. Borooah (forthcoming) stated that this theory is known by many other names including the rational actor model, public choice theory, and social choice theory. Gintis (2003) stated that the rational actor model is now being used in both sociology and political science even though it has long been used in economics. He believes that this model or theory applies to all human behavioral disciplines. According to rational choice theory or the rational actor model, each individual chooses an option or alternative that offers the highest reward, welfare, or utility in the words of the economist, given constraints, resources, and circumstances that the individual faces.

Gintis (2003, 5) stated:

The rational actor model assumes that agents have preferences reflecting their wants and the tradeoffs among these wants, and that agents maximize their utility by choosing from an action set that is limited by available information, material resources and time, cognitive capacity, and the agent's physical capacities. Choice is also contingent upon beliefs concerning the probabilities of various states of nature, the frequency distribution of types of agents with whom they interact, and the relative effectiveness of different actions. The rational actor model is most highly developed in economics, but it applies to all the disciplines dealing with human behavior.

Parry and Shields (2001) stated that many theoretical models of political participation have been developed which use a rational actor framework. According to the rational actor model, all individuals try to achieve the greatest welfare/utility subject to the resource constraints they face. However, those individuals with fewer constraints (lower costs) would engage more in a political activity such as going to the polls to vote, compared to someone with higher costs. Furthermore, those who have preferences yielding a higher benefit from a political activity will engage in more of the activity. Parry and Shields also cite the work by Schlozman, Burns, and Verba (1994) in which resources of the individual play a key role in influencing political behavior, which could include voter turnout or some other type of political action. Parry and Shields then use the rational actor model and the role of individual resources as described by Schlozman, Burns, and Verba, to formulate hypotheses concerning the effects of gender, income (education), and age on voter turnout (or political action and participation). Concerning the effect of age on political activity, Parry and Shields (2001, 511) stated the following:

Generally speaking, there are three main hypotheses accounting for the relationships between age and political participation. The *life-experience* hypothesis suggests that as people age, they acquire resources and have learning experiences that promote participation (Strate et al., 1989; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993:139). Alternatively, proponents of the *life-cycle* hypothesis argue that young citizens are less likely to vote because they lack the community involvement necessary to believe that politics is an important endeavor. This hypothesis also suggests that there will be a gradual decrease in political and social involvement among the most elderly as physical infirmities begin to increase and intensify (Cumming and Henry 1961; Milbrath and Goel, 1977:114-16; Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993:139), a pattern that may be especially common among women (Christy, 1987:91). Finally, proponents of the *generational* hypothesis suggest that socializing experiences influence each generation differently.

These hypotheses show that individuals of differing ages do face different costs, benefits, constraints, experiences, and resources. Thus it is to be expected, according to the rational actor model, that their involvement in political activity will differ. Furthermore, given these differences in costs, benefits, experiences, and resources, we would expect that individuals of differing ages would have different views and opinions regarding political issues such as the Lewinsky scandal. It is, in fact, through these formed opinions that individuals are moved to participate in political activities such as voting.

Given the above hypotheses concerning age and political participation and the link between age and opinions of the Clinton scandal, we would expect that older Americans would have been the ones more likely to want the matter dropped (compared to having the impeachment proceedings started) or to have Clinton resign to avoid the difficulties and political turbulence caused by putting the country through impeachment hearings. This fits into the *Life-experience* and *generational* hypotheses in that older individuals have experience with previous trials such as Watergate and the impeachment of former President Nixon, and that generation did not want to go through such a painful process again. This hypothesis (hypothesis 1) is summarized below:

*H1: Older individuals would have been less likely to be in favor of the impeachment of President Clinton and more in favor of resignation.*

Next, we turn to differences in opinions between males and females concerning the Clinton scandal. Atkeson and Rapoport (2003) have suggested that there are different ways of explaining gender differences in political participation and communication. In particular, socialization and political resources such as situational factors, education, and income, may play important roles in explaining gender differences in political engagement.

Parry and Shields (2001, 510) stated

Women, particularly in the 1990s, have become a target of political parties, activists, and pollsters. This barrage of invitation, influence, and obligation has been driven by--and has produced--such late 20th century icons as the "Soccer Mom" and "the Year (or the Decade) of the Woman" as well as record-level expenditures by woman-oriented political action committees.

Parry and Shields found that women were more likely to register and turn out to vote in the 1996 presidential election, holding everything else constant. Parry and Shields (2001, 506) further stated the following:

For the first time in history, the presidential election of 1996 produced a "women's president." Among men, Robert Dole was the preferred candidate by the narrow margin of 44 to 43 percent, but among women Bill Clinton was preferred 54 to 38 percent. The Clinton victory was made more robust by the

greater numbers of women in the voting age population as well as their recent turnout habits as compared to those of men.

This greater political participation and interest by women in a presidential candidate such as Clinton would likely have had an impact on their opinion of Clinton after the scandal. We would expect that women would have been more likely than men to favor resignation over impeachment if impeachment were thought to be a harsher form of punishment. This hypothesis (hypothesis 2) is summarized below:

*H2: Women would have been more likely than men to favor Clinton's resignation over impeachment.*

Next, we consider education and income. The effects of resources such as income and education on political participation have been examined in the past as noted by Schlozman, Burns, and Verba (1994). More specifically, those individuals with more resources (income and education) could be more satisfied with the current political administration and current economic situation and could therefore be more forgiving of the indiscretions of the current president. If resignation is viewed as a better outcome for the president than impeachment, those more forgiving of the president (those with more resources) may prefer it. [It is not clear that those with more education and income would prefer dropping the matter over resignation and impeachment. While dropping the matter is the least harsh punishment, many may concur that some form of punishment or censure was necessary]. This hypothesis is summarized below:

*H3: Those with more education and a higher income would be more likely to be in favor of Clinton's resignation over impeachment.*

This last hypothesis also suggests that the presence of children in a household can affect political participation, as noted by Parry and Shields. In particular, more children in a household leave fewer resources and less time for the adults to participate in political activities. In the case of public opinions of President Clinton, the presence of children in a household may lead the adults to be less forgiving of moral indiscretions of leaders. This would be especially true if the parents believed that the president should set an example for their children. Thus, we would expect these households to have been more in favor of resignation and impeachment compared to dropping the matter. This hypothesis is summarized below:

*H4: Those with children would be more likely to favor resignation and impeachment for the president, compared to having the matter dropped.*

Race also plays an important role when it comes to public opinions concerning President Clinton. Harvey (2000, A16) stated, "...Under the Clinton administration, black unemployment and poverty fell to the lowest rates in history, while income and home ownership soared to record highs. As president, Mr. Clinton put together a

diverse cabinet that includes three African-Americans; 13% of senior administration appointee positions are held by blacks". The article further cited President Clinton's trips to African nations and backing of affirmative action that led to support from the African-American community. With this widespread support, it would be expected that the African-American community would be more in favor of dropping the matter when it came to the Lewinsky scandal compared to the resignation or impeachment of the president. We summarize this hypothesis below:

*H5: African-Americans would have been more likely to be in favor of having the matter dropped rather than having the president resign or be impeached.*

Three remaining factors should have influenced public opinions of the president shortly after the Lewinsky scandal: political affiliation, political views, and religious beliefs. We would expect that Democrats would have been more likely to want the matter dropped and less likely to want resignation and impeachment, all other things constant. We would expect similar results for those with liberal political views compared to those with conservative views. Finally, we would expect that those who describe themselves as very religious would have been more in favor of resignation and/or impeachment compared to wanting the matter dropped. Kaufmann (2004) offered mechanisms through which religious beliefs are translated into political attitudes. These hypotheses are summarized below:

*H6: Democrats would be more likely to want the matter dropped rather than have the president resign or be impeached.*

*H7: Those with liberal political views would be more likely to want the matter dropped.*

*H8: Those who describe themselves as very religious would be more likely to want the president to resign or be impeached.*

These eight hypotheses are derivable from the rational actor model. They show that different individuals (actors) do face different circumstances, institutions, constraints, resources, and preferences. Due to the different situations they face such as age, gender, income, education, presence of children in the household, race, political affiliation, political views, and religious beliefs, their opinions of what should have been done in the case of the Lewinsky scandal are shaped. In the next section we describe the data and methodology used to test the above hypotheses.

### **3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

The data for this study came from a CBS NEWS / NEW YORK TIMES monthly poll taken from September 12 to September 15, 1998, shortly after the release of the Starr report on September 11, 1998 (and before the impeachment vote). [The data was provided by ICPSR, the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research].



A random-digit dialing survey was used to collect the sample and the universe was the adult population of the U.S. with a telephone, aged eighteen and over. The sample contained responses from 2,333 individuals although not all questions were asked on each of the survey days. The survey asked individuals for their opinions concerning the president's job performance, his moral and ethical values, and whether he should remain in office. This particular survey was chosen for this study due to the time it was taken (after the release of the Starr report and before the impeachment vote). The Starr report contained sexually explicit language and intensified the public debate over what should or should not be done to the president. There were other surveys available (after the release of the Starr report and before the impeachment vote), but these later polls solicited public opinions on a broader range of topics such as how the public would vote in the upcoming November 1998 congressional elections. The questions asked in the poll used for this study were more focused on the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. It should be noted, however, that the public opinions expressed in the poll were largely the reflection of journalistic reporting of what was in the Starr report as opposed to what was actually contained in the report since the poll was taken the day after the release of the 455 page report.

For certain survey questions, the respondent was faced with three or more alternatives. As an example, the respondent might have been asked to give his/her opinion as to what should happen to the president. The answers available to the respondent were a) the matter should be dropped, b) he should resign, or c) he should be impeached. The answers were coded 0, 1, and 2, respectively. These responses to this type of question can be modeled by using the multinomial logit model. The multinomial logit model for three choices is as follows:

$$(1) \quad P_{0i} = \frac{1}{1 + e^{\sum_j b_j X_{ji}} + e^{\sum_j a_j X_{ji}}}$$

$$(2) \quad P_{1i} = \frac{e^{\sum_j b_j X_{ji}}}{1 + e^{\sum_j b_j X_{ji}} + e^{\sum_j a_j X_{ji}}}$$

$$(3) \quad P_{2i} = \frac{e^{\sum_j a_j X_{ji}}}{1 + e^{\sum_j b_j X_{ji}} + e^{\sum_j a_j X_{ji}}}$$

$P_{0i}$  is the probability that the  $i^{\text{th}}$  respondent selects the answer coded 0.  $P_{1i}$  is the probability that the  $i^{\text{th}}$  respondent selects the answer coded 1, and  $P_{2i}$  is similarly defined. It should be noted that the sum of the probabilities for a given respondent equals 1. The  $X$ s represent the attributes and characteristics of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  respondent, such as age, race, gender, education, income, party affiliation, political philosophy, religious attitudes, and other factors that influence a person's opinion concerning President Clinton or his actions (and, therefore, affect the probability that this person will select a given answer).<sup>1</sup> In this formulation, the (maximum likelihood) estimates can be obtained for the betas and the alphas, and probabilities can be calculated for individuals with different attributes and demographic characteristics to see which groups favored resignation, impeachment or moving on.

In the next section, the logit results from the survey will be presented.

#### 4. RESULTS

As stated in the previous sections, this study will focus on how the respondents to the survey answered the following question: "Now that President Clinton has testified before Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr's grand jury and made public statements, what do you think should happen?" The three choices available were these: a) the matter should be dropped, b) Clinton should resign, and c) Congress should begin impeachment proceedings.

The variables used in estimating the multinomial logit model are taken from the eight hypotheses described earlier and their values and coded names are given in Table 1. The parameter estimates are given in Table 2. In this table, the reference category is "the matter should be dropped" while the betas and alphas are the coefficients for the "resign" and "start the impeachment proceedings" choices, respectively.

The logit estimates are typically not directly interpreted, but out of the ten explanatory variables, only the coefficient of one (CHILDREN) was statistically insignificant in the entire model, at a level exceeding 12%. The presence of children could theoretically affect an individual's available resources and influence his/her opinion of the president in areas of moral indiscretion. However, we did not find this to be true. Our finding, however, is similar to that of Parry and Shields (2001); they found that the presence of school-age children had no effect on political activity (voter turnout) for men or women. Therefore we reject our fourth hypothesis (H4).

In Tables 3 and 4 we have used the estimated coefficients from Table 2 along with equations (1), (2), and (3) stated earlier in the paper, to estimate the probabilities that individuals with different  $X$ s (attributes and characteristics) would have preferred to have the matter dropped, have Clinton resign, or have Congress begin the impeachment proceedings. The first six items in Table 3 (or Table 4) combine various characteristics for male Democrats. The second six items only differ from the first six in that female Democrats are considered. The last twelve items are the same as the first twelve items for male and female Republicans. The only difference between Table 3 and Table 4 is

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<sup>1</sup> In this formulation,  $X_{i1} = 1$  for all  $i$  to allow for an intercept term.

that Table 3 contains results for African-Americans while Table 4 is for non-African-Americans (mostly white). The first noticeable difference in the probability estimates is that African-Americans were far more likely than any of their non-black counterparts to want the matter dropped. This result is not surprising, is entirely consistent with what the media reported, and leads us to not reject our fifth hypothesis (H5).<sup>2</sup> What our estimates reveal, however, is that considerable differences in opinion did exist among African-Americans when it comes to the Clinton scandal. Other factors such as political party affiliation, religious attitudes, political views, age, and education, also played a role in how opinions were shaped in the black community (and non-black community).

We first consider the role of age. In Table 3 (and Table 4), we look at 48 individuals, 24 of whom have the same characteristics as the others except for age, one being 55 and the other, 25. Our study finds that age did have an effect on opinions of the Clinton scandal. In particular, for older African-Americans, there was a small increase in the probability of wanting the matter dropped and wanting Clinton to resign. These increased probabilities show up as a smaller probability in wanting the impeachment process started. For example, for a male African-American who is a liberal Republican and a college graduate with an annual family income of over \$30,000 and who attends church every week, the probability of wanting the matter dropped increased from 57% to 61%, the probability of wanting Clinton to resign increased from 16% to 22%, and the probability of wanting the impeachment proceedings started decreased from 27% to 17%, when age increases from 25 to 55 (item 14, Table 3). David Bositis (2001, 49) stated that there may be substantial differences in the views and opinions of younger and older African-Americans:

On balance, except for the fact that they do not support the Republican party, black Generation Xers--or at least a very significant portion of them--would appear to be a fairly conservative, and potentially Republican-leaning, group. Seniors on the other hand, are bedrock Democrats. The generational differences between these two age cohorts are substantial and real.

This may, in part, explain why younger African-Americans were more inclined to want the impeachment proceedings started. In Table 4, similar results also tended to hold for non-African-Americans. This again suggests that older Americans were more likely to want the matter dropped or to have Clinton resign to avoid the difficulties and

<sup>2</sup> The marginal effects of the explanatory variables for the three choice model can be shown to be

$$\frac{\partial P_{Yi}}{\partial X_j} = P_{Yi} (d_j - b_j P_{1i} - a_j P_{2i}), \text{ where } d_j \text{ equals } 0, \beta_j, \text{ or } a_j, \text{ given } Y = 0, 1, \text{ or } 2, \text{ respectively. The sum}$$

of these marginal effects for a given change in  $X_j$  equals zero. As an example, if the probabilities of selecting options 0 and 1 are higher for an older individual (an increase in age) then the probability of selecting option 2 must be lower for that individual. The marginal effects for the race variable are 0.36, -0.30, and -0.06, for  $Y = 0, 1, \text{ and } 2$ , respectively. Thus African-Americans were 36% more likely to want the matter dropped, 30% less likely to want Clinton's resignation, and 6% less likely to want the impeachment proceedings to start, all other factors held constant. (These marginal effects have been calculated at the means of the explanatory variables).

political turbulence caused by putting the country through impeachment hearings. Thus, we do not reject our first hypothesis (H1).<sup>3</sup>

Next, we turn to differences in opinions between males and females concerning the Clinton scandal. Our results show that women were more likely than men to favor resignation over impeachment (although less likely to want the matter dropped). As an example, a white male, 55-year old Democrat with conservative political views who attends church every week and is a college graduate (item 1, Table 4), had a probability of wanting Clinton to resign of .27 and a probability of wanting impeachment of .08. A white female with the same characteristics (item 7, Table 4) had a probability of wanting Clinton to resign of .34 and a probability of wanting impeachment of .05. This would suggest that those who were initially strong backers of Clinton in 1996 (including women) would have preferred resignation (voluntary or otherwise) to impeachment, the latter of which could be viewed as harsh punishment for someone they otherwise supported. Therefore, we do not reject our second hypothesis (H2).<sup>4</sup>

Our results also show that education and income had an effect on opinions of the Clinton scandal. In our study, those individuals with more resources (income and education) tended to be more satisfied with the current political administration and current economic situation and, therefore, would have been more forgiving of the current president. If resignation were viewed as a better outcome for the president than impeachment, those with more resources would have chosen it. For example, a black male Republican with conservative views who never attended church who graduated from college, and who had a total family income in excess of \$30,000, had a probability of wanting Clinton to resign of .23 and a probability of wanting impeachment of .11 (item 15, Table 3). For the same individual who did not graduate from high school and who had an income of less than \$30,000, the probability of wanting Clinton to resign was .15, and the probability of wanting impeachment was .15 (item 17, Table 3). It is interesting to note, however, that those with more education and income were less likely to want the matter completely dropped. We, thus, do not reject our third hypothesis (H3).<sup>5</sup>

The remaining explanatory variables (political party, political views, and church attendance) had effects that were to be expected. Throughout Tables 3 and 4,

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<sup>3</sup> The marginal effects for the age variable are -0.00025, 0.00211, and -0.0019, for  $Y = 0, 1$  and  $2$ , respectively. Thus for a person 10 years older (all other variables held constant) the probability of wanting the matter dropped does not substantially change, but the probability of wanting Clinton's resignation increases by 2% and the probability of wanting impeachment decreases by 2%. (Again these marginal effects have been calculated at the means of the explanatory variables).

<sup>4</sup> The marginal effects for the gender variable are 0.035, -0.07, and 0.035, for the  $Y = 0, 1$ , and  $2$ , respectively. Since the gender variable is coded 1 for males and 0 for females, the results indicate that males were 3.5% more likely to want the matter dropped, 7% less likely to want Clinton's resignation, and 3.5% more likely to want the impeachment process started, all other factors held constant.

<sup>5</sup> The marginal effects for income are 0.001, 0.03, and -0.03, for  $Y = 0, 1$ , and  $2$ , respectively. The marginal effects for education are -0.02, 0.02, and 0.0002. These results indicate that more education (moving from a high school graduate to some college and then to a college graduate) increased the probability of wanting Clinton's resignation by 2% and lowered the probability of wanting the matter dropped by 2%. An increase in income from under \$30,000 per year to over \$30,000 per year increased the probability of wanting Clinton's resignation by 3% and decreased the probability of wanting impeachment by 3%, holding all other factors constant.

Democrats were more likely to want the matter dropped and less likely to want resignation and impeachment, all other things constant. Similar results held for those with liberal political views compared to those with conservative views and those who never attended church compared to those who attended every week. We, thus, do not reject our sixth, seventh, and eighth hypotheses (H6, H7, H8).<sup>6</sup>

What this analysis shows is that there were many attributes and demographic characteristics of an individual that affected the opinions of that individual concerning what should have happened to President Clinton after the release of the Starr report. It is only by looking at a combination of these characteristics, however, that we can see how final opinions were formed. The results in Table 3 show that there was no "one" opinion of African-Americans nor was there "one" opinion of white Americans as shown in Table 4 (nor was there "one" opinion of Democrats or "one" opinion of Republicans). Even among black Republicans, the probability of wanting the Clinton scandal dropped ranged from .49 to .77, and the probability of wanting impeachment ranged from .07 to .30. An African-American male Republican with conservative political views who attended church every week and was a college graduate had a 19% probability of wanting impeachment (item 13, Table 3). A younger male (25 years of age rather than 55) had a probability of wanting impeachment of 30%. However, if this younger male had liberal political views, never attended church, did not graduate from high school, and had a family income of less than \$30,000, the probability of wanting impeachment fell back to 20% (item 18, Table 3).

As another example of how the combination of traits affected opinions, we considered a white 25-year old male Republican with liberal political views, who never attended church and graduated from college. He would have preferred dropping the matter (probability of .37) to resignation (probability of .33) and would have preferred resignation to impeachment (probability of .30) [item 16, Table 4]. While the Republican trait and age for this individual favored the opposite results, the liberal political views and church attendance (or lack thereof) reinforced this outcome. If this individual had the same traits as before with the exception of attending church every week (item 14, Table 4), the ordering of probabilities and options preferred would be completely reversed. This person would have preferred impeachment (probability of .41) over resignation (probability of .34) and resignation over dropping the matter (probability of .25). Certainly, the complex combination of attributes that everyone is made up of can have conflicting influences on our political opinions.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Using logit regression, this study has examined public opinions of President Clinton and issues that have come out of the Starr report. The following results were found:

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<sup>6</sup> The marginal effects show that Republicans were 48% less likely to want the matter dropped, 33 % more likely to want resignation, and 15% more likely to want impeachment. Conservatives were 7% less likely to want the matter dropped, 2% more likely to favor resignation, and 5% more likely to favor impeachment. Regular church attendees were 3% less likely to want the matter dropped, 2% more likely to want resignation, and 1% more likely to want impeachment, holding all other factors constant.

First, age had an effect on opinions concerning the Clinton scandal with younger individuals more likely to want the impeachment process to begin. This provides some support for the *Life-experience* hypothesis. Second, women were more likely to want Clinton to resign and less likely to want impeachment, which is perhaps consistent with the strong support Clinton had from women voters in the 1996 election. Third, those with more education and income were more likely to want Clinton to resign and less likely to want impeachment, which is consistent with the *resource* hypothesis. Finally, it was the combination of attributes and individual characteristics that determined how final opinions were established concerning resignation, impeachment, and dropping the matter.

The factors identified in this study as being consistent with the opinions surrounding the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal are not just peculiar to this case and sexual indiscretions of politicians. As an example, Dye (1997) stated that those in different age groups often have different opinions due to "generational effects." Those who lived through the Great Depression, for example, would more likely favor government income-maintenance programs. Furthermore, those with strong religious beliefs express very different opinions than those without these beliefs on a number of issues including abortion, drugs, and pre-marital sex. Race has also been an important factor contributing to differences in public opinions. Dye stated, "African Americans generally support a more positive role for government in reducing inequality in society" (p. 146). The Clinton-Lewinsky scandal offered another opportunity to view the role race plays in explaining differences in public opinions. William Bennett best described the importance of the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal (1998, 10):

Once in a great while a single national event provides insight into where we are and who we are and what we esteem. The Clinton presidency has provided us with a window onto our times, our moral order, our understanding of citizenship. The many Clinton scandals tell us, in a way few other events can, where we are in our public philosophy. They reveal insights into how we view politics and power; virtue and vice; public trust and respect for the law; sexual morality and standards of personal conduct.

Where did the American public stand in regard to these issues? This study points out which segments of our society did not approve or understand what the president did. In future presidential campaigns, presidential hopefuls may want to concentrate on bringing in these groups who have been alienated from the political process by what happened during the Clinton administration.

Studies such as this one are also important in understanding how the public and politicians have reacted to similar cases involving sexual misconduct. Gary Condit, a member of the U.S. Congress, informed police of his involvement with Chandra Levy, a Bureau of Prisons intern, whose body was found in May of 2002. The case was compared to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal. Condit's involvement with Chandra Levy did not go unnoticed by the public and in the 2002 Democratic primary, he was defeated ([www.who2.com/garycondit.html](http://www.who2.com/garycondit.html)).

A more recent example of a sex scandal involving a politician was the case of New Jersey Governor, James McGreevey, who announced his resignation in August 2004 after informing the public that he was gay and was involved in an adulterous affair ([www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/08/12/mcgreevey](http://www.cnn.com/2004/ALLPOLITICS/08/12/mcgreevey)). An understanding of how public opinions are formed can help predict what segments of the voting public will be more or less forgiving of these sorts of indiscretions. Based on the percent of the voting public in each of these segments, predictions can then be made concerning the future political career of the politician involved.

This study also shows that different individuals face different costs, benefits, circumstances, constraints, and resources, and these factors not only have a bearing on their political activity as specified in the "rational actor model," but also on the formation of their political opinions, which guide their political activity. Models such as this one may be useful in exploring the formation of public opinions concerning other moral and social issues as well as political issues. For example, the war in Iraq has left the nation divided. Some individuals believe that the U.S. should be in Iraq while others believe that what the U.S. is doing in Iraq is not justifiable. Logit models such as the one used in this study may prove useful in identifying how these public opinions are formed. The results could also indicate what alternative policies or strategies in Iraq would lead to different public opinions.

**Table 1. Description of Variables**

<u>Variable Name</u>	<u>Values</u>
Children	1 - if children under eighteen are present in the household 0 - if not
Party	1 - if respondent thinks of himself/herself as closer to the Republican party 0 - if closer to the Democratic Party
Gender	1 - if the respondent is male 0 - if female
Liberal	1 - if the respondent would describe himself/herself as having a liberal view on most political matters 0 - if not
Conservative	1 - if the respondent would describe himself/herself as having a conservative view on most political matters 0 - if not [if both Liberal and Conservative variables are coded 0, then the respondent would describe himself/herself as having a moderate view on most political matters]
Religious	5 - if the respondent attends church every week 4 - if the answer is "almost every week" 3 - if the answer is "once/twice a month" 2 - if the answer is "a few times a year" 1 - if the answer is "never"
Education	5 - if the respondent has completed some post-graduate study 4 - if the respondent is a college graduate 3 - if the respondent has some college 2 - if the respondent is a high school graduate 1 - if the respondent is not a high school graduate
Age	a continuous variable from 18 to 98
Race	1 - if the respondent is an African-American 0 - if not
Income	1 - if total family income in 1997 was over \$30,000 0 - if less



**Table 2. Multinomial Logit Estimates**

[Dependent Variable: 0] the matter should be dropped, 1) Clinton should resign, or 2) Congress should begin impeachment proceedings].

<u>Variable</u>	<u>Beta</u>			<u>Alpha</u>		
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>z-value</u>	<u>P-value</u>	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>z-value</u>	<u>P-value</u>
Constant	-2.3833*	-6.372	0.00000	-2.8529*	-5.578	0.00000
Children	0.040557	0.256	0.79788	-0.055742	-0.264	0.79152
Party	1.8802*	12.110	0.00000	2.3195*	9.695	0.00000
Gender	-0.29245*	-1.969	0.04899	0.29844	1.458	0.14477
Liberal	-0.24425	-1.202	0.22929	0.45456**	1.585	0.11301
Conservative	0.20043	1.201	0.22958	0.71094*	3.072	0.00212
Religious	0.11928*	2.298	0.02155	0.18664*	2.591	0.00958
Education	0.12096**	1.719	0.08555	0.042607	0.435	0.66361
Age	0.00746**	1.601	0.10947	-0.018564*	-2.881	0.00396
Race	-1.6085*	-4.426	0.00001	-1.2358*	-2.690	0.00715
Income	0.1078	0.625	0.53195	-0.35127**	-1.559	0.11903

\* These coefficients are statistically significant at the 5% (or less) level.

\*\* These coefficients are statistically significant at the 5% to 12% level.

Note: After deleting those observations with missing values, the remaining sample consisted of 1,285 responses.

**Table 3. Probabilities that African-Americans Thought the Matter Should Be Dropped ( $P_0$ ), President Clinton Should Resign ( $P_1$ ), and Congress Should Begin the Impeachment Proceedings ( $P_2$ ).**

Political Party	Gender	Political View	Church Attendance	Education	Age	Income	drop $P_0$	resign $P_1$	impeach $P_2$
1- Democrat	Male	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.89	.08	.03
					25		.89	.06	.05
2- Democrat	Male	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.93	.05	.02
					25		.91	.04	.04
3- Democrat	Male	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.94	.05	.01
					25		.93	.04	.03
4- Democrat	Male	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.96	.03	.01
					25		.95	.03	.02
5- Democrat	Male	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.95	.03	.02
					25		.94	.03	.03
6- Democrat	Male	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.96	.02	.02
					25		.96	.02	.02
7- Democrat	Female	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.88	.10	.02
					25		.88	.08	.04
8- Democrat	Female	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.92	.06	.02
					25		.92	.05	.03
9- Democrat	Female	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.93	.06	.01
					25		.93	.05	.02
10- Democrat	Female	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.95	.04	.01
					25		.95	.03	.02
11- Democrat	Female	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.95	.04	.01
					25		.94	.03	.03
12- Democrat	Female	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.96	.03	.01
					25		.96	.02	.02
13- Repub.	Male	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.52	.29	.19
					25		.49	.21	.30
14- Repub.	Male	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.61	.22	.17
					25		.57	.16	.27
15- Repub.	Male	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.66	.23	.11
					25		.64	.17	.19
16- Repub.	Male	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.74	.16	.10
					25		.71	.13	.16
17- Repub.	Male	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.70	.15	.15
					25		.65	.11	.24
18- Repub.	Male	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.77	.10	.13
					25		.72	.08	.20
19- Repub.	Female	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.50	.37	.13
					25		.49	.28	.23
20- Repub.	Female	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.60	.28	.12
					25		.58	.21	.21
21- Repub.	Female	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.63	.29	.08
					25		.63	.23	.14
22- Repub.	Female	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.72	.21	.07
					25		.71	.17	.12
23- Repub.	Female	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.69	.20	.11
					25		.67	.15	.18
24- Repub.	Female	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.77	.14	.09
					25		.74	.11	.15

**Table 4. Probabilities that Non-African-Americans Thought the Matter Should Be Dropped ( $P_0$ ), President Clinton Should Resign ( $P_1$ ), and Congress Should Begin the Impeachment Proceedings ( $P_2$ ).**

Political Party	Political Gender	Political View	Church Attendance	Education	Age	Income	drop $P_0$	resign $P_1$	impeach $P_2$
1- Democrat	Male	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.65	.27	.08
					25		.65	.21	.14
2- Democrat	Male	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.73	.20	.07
					25		.73	.15	.12
3- Democrat	Male	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.76	.20	.04
					25		.76	.16	.08
4- Democrat	Male	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.82	.14	.04
					25		.83	.11	.06
5- Democrat	Male	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.81	.13	.06
					25		.80	.10	.10
6- Democrat	Male	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.86	.09	.05
					25		.85	.07	.08
7- Democrat	Female	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.61	.34	.05
					25		.62	.28	.10
8- Democrat	Female	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.70	.25	.05
					25		.71	.20	.09
9- Democrat	Female	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.72	.25	.03
					25		.74	.20	.06
10- Democrat	Female	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.80	.18	.02
					25		.81	.14	.05
11- Democrat	Female	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.79	.17	.04
					25		.79	.14	.07
12- Democrat	Female	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.85	.12	.03
					25		.85	.09	.06
13- Repub.	Male	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.20	.55	.25
					25		.19	.41	.40
14- Repub.	Male	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.27	.47	.26
					25		.25	.34	.41
15- Repub.	Male	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.30	.52	.18
					25		.30	.40	.30
16- Repub.	Male	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.39	.43	.18
					25		.37	.33	.30
17- Repub.	Male	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.36	.38	.26
					25		.32	.27	.41
18- Repub.	Male	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.45	.30	.25
					25		.40	.39	.21
19- Repub.	Female	Conservative	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.18	.66	.16
					25		.18	.53	.29
20- Repub.	Female	Liberal	every week	College Grad	55	>30,000	.25	.58	.17
					25		.24	.46	.30
21- Repub.	Female	Conservative	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.27	.61	.12
					25		.28	.51	.21
22- Repub.	Female	Liberal	never	College Grad	55	>30,000	.36	.52	.12
					25		.37	.42	.21
23- Repub.	Female	Conservative	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.34	.48	.18
					25		.32	.37	.31
24- Repub.	Female	Liberal	never	Not H.S. Grad	55	<30,000	.43	.39	.18
					25		.41	.29	.30

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Carl E. Enomoto  
Professor of Economics  
New Mexico State University  
email: cenomoto@nmsu.edu  
tel: (505) 646-1992

Nancy V. Baker  
Associate Professor of Government  
New Mexico State University  
email: nbaker@nmsu.edu  
tel: (505) 646-4935