

# United Front: Blame Management and Scandal Response Tactics of the United Nations

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**In this paper we conduct a systematic study of the United Nations (UN) responses to allegations of transgression. We examine the patterns in the UN reaction to scandals, the types of accounts, the institutional providers of the responses, and the implications of scandals for the UN and its' official(s). We conduct a content analysis of the UN scandal and account coverage in international (print) media in the last 25 years, and find a scandal-responsive UN, particularly in the case of institutional scandals. Concessions issued by the office of the Secretary General is dominant UN account to allegations of misconduct. Individual staff members implicated in the scandals offer a greater variety of accounts and often suffer resignations and severe punishments.**

## 1. The United Nations (UN) under scandal attack

This paper examines the responses offered by the UN and its officials in light of a scandal. Understanding scandal response patterns is important in an era where more international and regional organizations are coming into existence, and governance is gradually delegated to this higher plain. The UN is often acknowledged as the 'highest tier' in international organizations, because no other intergovernmental organization comes close to the broad goals of its Charter and universality of its membership. Because of its prominent and ambitious international profile, the UN has been the focus of scholarly research by several academics, highlighting specific topics closely related to the UN's core duties and responsibilities.<sup>1</sup> Accompanying the UN's

peacekeeping and humanitarian intervention initiatives every step of the way is also the international media. Images of the UN sweeping into a conflict zone to end genocide, rape, and starvation make for good television. But along with the good come the bad and even the ugly news.<sup>2</sup> The UN failures in peacekeeping during the 1990s left a serious stain on the organization and a negative mark on the minds of the general public. The missions into Somalia, Bosnia, Liberia, and Rwanda showed the UN's inability to 'cope with new and festering internal conflicts, where the involved parties had no interest in finding a peaceful solution' (Krasno, 2004, pp. 249–250). Images of Dutch peacekeeping troops helping Serb forces deport Bosnian Muslims from the UN 'safe haven' of Srebrenica who were later executed, or reports of the millions of Tutsis butchered in Rwanda led to intense criticism.

Policy failures are not the only type of negative press the UN receives. UN scandals pertain to actions of misconduct or impropriety, unpopular decisions regarding policy, and abuses of power by UN officials, involving not only the individual policymakers but also the organization. During the infamous Oil For Food scandal in Iraq in 2002, the UN was heavily criticized by the media and several nations, particularly the United States. The reports of widespread corruption within the programme prompted investigations, audits, committee hearings, and criminal prosecutions, tarnishing the reputation of many UN officials. The Army-of-Lovers scandal in Lebanon in 1980, the UNICEF-Fraud scandal in Kenya in 1995, the Sex for Food scandals in Bosnia and Congo in 1997, the UNSCOM-Spying scandal in Iraq in 1999, the Procurement/Peacekeeping scandal in New York, and the Catering scandal in Britain in 2005, the Housing Subsidy scandals in 2006, are only a few of the cases that have received media attention over the years, and the list goes on.

The UN is certainly not scandal-proof but scandal damage is also not always certain or irreversible. To minimize the loss of public trust and other negative fall-out effects, the implicated public officials and the UN organization respond with a variety of strategies. According to McGraw (2002), the most crucial element of 'blame management' strategies is the *account* issued. An account is a publicly spoken attempt to limit any damage to reputation and legitimacy by providing a satisfying explanation, and it most often takes the form of an excuse, a justification, a denial, or a concession.<sup>3</sup> Despite the intensive study of the UN by academic scholars, there is little focus on the public reaction of the UN as an organization when implicated in a scandal, and the response of its officials.

These are important questions to answer because the manner in which the UN deals with scandals reflects upon the organization's integrity and credibility, its culture and its sense of responsibility, as well as the manner in which it functions in the international system. Scandals can greatly embarrass the organization and directly affect its reputation and standing. The negative media coverage influences the expectations of the public and political elites regarding the integrity of the accused officials, but also the level of systemic corruption within the UN organization. For example, take the well-known scandal that broke out in April 2007 and implicated the World Bank director Paul Wolfowitz, who gave a significant pay raise to his partner, Shaha Riza. Mr. Wolfowitz had transferred Ms. Riza to the US State Department, but she still received her hefty tax-free paycheck from the World Bank.<sup>4</sup> Or take the EUROSTAT scandal in 1999, whereby the entire European Commission was brought down, due to large-scale fraud in its statistical department.<sup>5</sup> Scandals like these receive widespread media

coverage and have significant implications for the reputation of the organization involved. If for example, the UN denies the wrongdoings of its scandal-accused officials, or simply does not take any responsibility for their actions, this echoes not only in the way the UN sees itself and its role in the world, but also in how the (member) states view, treat, and respect the organization. In short, it is the UN's reputation that is at stake, and this makes vital the understanding of its operating procedure in the context of a scandal-induced crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Our paper addresses the lack of systematic research on the way in which the UN publicly responds to allegations of transgression. Our work borrows insights from the literature on political scandals and blame management (Lull & Hinerman, 1988; McGraw, 2002; Thompson, 1995, 2002). We conduct a thorough content analysis of the UN scandal and account coverage in international print media since 1 January 1980, and using the typology of accounts devised by McGraw (2002), we discuss the characteristics of the responses (concessions, excuses, justifications, and denials) provided by the UN and its appointed staff members to allegations of misconduct. We then identify patterns in the ways the UN reacts to scandals, and discuss the three central components of blame management: transparency, accountability, and leadership.

*Transparency* refers to the visibility of a scandal and the decision from the part of the organization and the implicated official(s) to issue an account or opt to not make a statement. This decision depends on the opportunities actors see to avoid blame or shift blame to others.<sup>7</sup> We are interested in whether certain types of scandals stimulate the UN to issue an account. Borrowing from Thompson's (1995) typology we elaborate on the two scandal types (individual and institutional) in which both officials and the organization can be implicated. *Accountability* refers to the type of account provided and the implications for the parties involved. Here we focus on whether there is a dominant type of account that appears in most cases or the type of account shows variation. Blame management research by McGraw (2002) shows that the type of response varies depending on two central factors: the extent to which the providers view their actions as negative, and the degree to which they take responsibility. To the extent that the UN varies the frame of the scandal from negative to positive, and distances itself from the involved officials or shares responsibility, the type of the accounts is expected to vary. We turn to the type, complexity, and size of the scandal to determine how acknowledgement of wrongdoing and acceptance of responsibility takes place in the form of accounts. Accountability is also reflected in punitive actions that follow a scandal; whether the UN takes actions against its wayward officials, or considers their

resignation sufficient. Finally, *leadership* involves the level of the issued response, or who provides the account, and whether this varies on the basis of the scandal type and the level of responsibility and blame assumed.

Our study adds to the ongoing debate on accountability and responsibility in international organizations. The need to understand the blame management tactics of international organizations is ever increasing as allegations of misconduct are widespread and ongoing. Our line of research can expand to include similar tier international organizations (e.g., global monetary organizations like the World Bank, the World Trade Organization, or the International Monetary Fund) or regional organizations (the Economic Community of East African States, the European Parliament or Commission, or Mercosul).

In our paper, we first provide a short overview of the UN organizational structure, which sheds light on its key players with regards to blame management. Then we turn to the literature on scandals and political accounts, to discuss the characteristics of the negative events and their responses, at the individual and organizational level. In our methodology section we present the content analysis design, followed by our analysis focusing on the frequency and type of accounts provided by both the UN institution and the implicated official, the level of the UN response, and the scandal impact. In our conclusions, we discuss the limitations of our work and offer suggestions for further avenues of research.

## 2. Managing blame: the challenges of maintaining a favourable UN reputation

### 2.1. The UN management actors

The UN emerged from the devastation caused by the Second World War as a replacement of the League of Nations. The name of the organization made its first appearance in the 'Declaration by United Nations' on 1 January 1942 by US President Franklin Roosevelt, referring to the 26 nations, which vowed to continue their war against, and not individually sign a peace treaty with, any of the Axis Powers.<sup>8</sup>

After Second World War, the Cold War commenced. Because of the Cold War and the then bipolar state of the international system, the UN was mostly paralysed with regards to its primary goals of providing collective security for its members and actively engaging in peacekeeping. This was mostly a result of the UN's Security Council's (SC) composition, which allows for 10 rotating members and five permanent members with veto powers over SC resolutions. Both the United States and the Soviet Union were permanent members. As a result

many SC resolutions, which conflicted with their respective interests, were vetoed.

This accounts for the lack of UN peacekeeping during the Cold War. In other areas outside of the SC sphere of influence, such as socioeconomic matters, the UN was able to obtain more success in the decades following the Second World War though. Not entirely surprising, after the fall of the Soviet Union there was to be a substantial rise in peacekeeping missions and humanitarian interventions, as well as SC resolutions, which would pass (Krasno, 2004, p. 246).

Currently, the UN is comprised of six principal administrative bodies: the SC, the General Assembly (GA), the International Court of Justice, the Economic and Social Council, the Trustee Council (which suspended its operations in 1994), and the Secretariat.<sup>9</sup> While these six principal components are individually crucial to the effectuation of each of the Charter goals, it is the Secretariat that provides the bureaucracy and the administrative support to execute UN policy and link the principal UN organs to one another. Goldstein calls the Secretariat 'the UN's executive branch', because it is the bureaucracy for administering UN policy and programmes. As such, the Secretariat has many subsidiary organs, each dealing with a particular field, policy or programme (Goldstein, 2003, p. 278).<sup>10</sup>

The civil servants of the Secretariat are headed by the Secretary General (SG), who is elected by the appointed representatives of the member states of the GA. Article 97 of the Charter calls the SG the 'chief administrative officer' of the organization, but the SG is far more than that. He is also a diplomat, a 'symbol of the UN's ideals', and a spokesperson for the more disenfranchised peoples of the world.<sup>11</sup> The SG is foremost charged with acting out the administrative portion of the policies of the six primary organs of the organization, and composing an annual report to the GA. He is also charged with preparing, and defending, the biennial budgetary report for the GA (Ziring, Riggs, & Plano, 2000, p. 123).

The SG is the 'face' to the UN, but cannot personally deal with all its press matters. The Spokesperson of the SG has the responsibility of making the UN's mission and works known to the world through the international media, and has an office to assist in the execution of these duties. These include making statements to the press, performing daily briefings, and managing all the specific procedures during these statements and briefings on behalf of the SG.<sup>12</sup> The presence of an institutionalized spokesperson (plus office and support staff) has the added effect of granting the UN a measure of transparency.

But transparency alone is not an effective deterrent of corruptive practices. The media, the political elites, or the average citizen, do not constantly check up on all the activities and decisions made at the UN. Therefore

another office is required to perform the necessary internal audits, investigations, inspections, programme monitoring, and evaluations of UN personnel, departments, offices and programmes worldwide on a permanent basis. For these tasks the GA established the independent Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) in 1994.<sup>13</sup> Headed by an Under Secretary General (USG) (appointed for a non-renewable 5-year term), OIOS' mission is to add value to the organization by 'promoting responsible administration of its resources, a culture of accountability and transparency, and improved programme performance'.<sup>14</sup>

These three offices of the executive branch of the UN are the first line of defense in the advent of an organizational crisis or a scandal to preserve the UN reputation from blame. It is during such times that the leadership of the OSG has to guide the organization through, while having its Spokesperson relay their efforts, intentions and standpoints as effectively and clearly as possible to the media. The OIOS in turn can investigate the matter, and from its inquiries the wayward officials may be held accountable. Although criticized at times as a 'sprawling array of fiefdoms' that is 'not serious about cleaning up',<sup>15</sup> the UN departments and *ad hoc* panels cooperate towards a shared goal: to demonstrate that the UN has an organizational mechanism in place to respond in times of scandal-induced crisis in order to preserve its reputation of integrity. In the Oil for Food scandal a special panel was appointed to investigate the matter, while the Spokesperson for the SG and the UN Department of Public Information dealt specifically with the media through set press conferences (Shawn, 2006). The OIOS was involved in identifying and reporting acts of corruption and mismanagement.

The reputation of the UN relies not only on the solid performance of its various departments and offices in the event of a crisis, but also on the behaviour of its staff (Umansky, 1993). According to the UN Staff Regulations, the UN civil servant is required to shift his/her national loyalties to the international organization and its moral codes. Integrity, impartiality, and independence are the three principal elements of a UN staffer (Ziring et al., 2000, p. 120). Honest UN staffers are not false to their own moral standards and responsibilities towards others (including the organization he/she swore an oath to). The staffers' impartiality further ensures that they act in a neutral fashion towards all member states, except when the UN's interests and objectives are involved. This requires the officials to be prudent, when discussing controversial matters, and to avoid taking sides (Ziring et al., 2000). Finally, independence refers to the ability of UN employees to act without regard to any political pressure or instructions 'from any national government or any other authority external to the organization'.<sup>16</sup>

The expectations of integrity, impartiality, and independence are not always met, and the unfit behaviour of UN staff is often challenged by the media reporting on scandals. With the total number of UN Secretariat staffers alone amounting to about 8,900 from some 170 countries, allegations of misconduct are not a rare oddity.<sup>17</sup> The integrity standards that the Charter requires at every level of the UN civil service, pose prominently for some as the gold crown, but others see it as the Achille's heel for the organization.

## 2.2. UN reputation under attack

In the era of globalization, and the increasing immediacy and openness of information, reputation assessments are very susceptible to change. An organization with a fine reputation which took decades to build, may lose its good name very quickly in the event of a crisis such as a scandal. Scandals are *information events* about an act that is considered immoral or shocking, are made available to a large audience, carry blame attributions and result in an injury or loss of reputation to the individual(s) or organization involved.<sup>18</sup> Scandals are immoral or shocking acts made public, and cannot exist without an audience. What distinguishes corruption from scandals is that corruption acts do not need an audience. As Funk (1996) argued, of all those behaviours that conflict with society's moral standards, it is only the publicized ones that constitute scandals. Scandals are interpretations of immoral acts, which are defined through the media, elites and public discourse. The UN member states, media and general public critically follow the UN actions, so we expect to find a good number of scandal cases in recent history.

Scandals are important because they carry an impact on the reputation of the implicated actors. As a corrupt or immoral act becomes a scandal, the circulation of information results in some degree of damage to the reputations of those involved. Even the simplest classification of political scandals divides them into severe, or mild, depending on how 'expensive' they are for those implicated. The UN can attempt to preserve its reputation, but like any other organization it cannot 'own' it. It may also be confronted with a reputational crisis *via association* with a scandal (Booth, 2000, p. 197). For example, when UN High Commissioner for Refugees (first name?) Lubbers allegedly harassed a subordinate, it was not the UN organization that did the harassing. However, its reputation was affected due to the 'association' with the individual in question.

For the UN, scandals can be particularly disastrous, because they can affect the core elements of its reputation. Its public image is based on assessments by the general public as well as key interest actors, such as the media, political elites, and the government of the

UN member states (Booth, 2000). How these audiences perceive a scandal and the explanations that surround it, can be the determining factor to the success of a chosen blame-management strategy, and has significant impact on the organizational reputation (Capelos, 2007). Opinions of elite groups such as academics, corporate executives, leaders of think tanks, or special interest groups, policy experts, media officials and journalists are particularly important, because they play a crucial role in providing the UN its legitimacy, and its (moral) authority.

Consequently, scandal management is important for the preservation of the organization's (moral) authority, which in turn rests on its credibility, legitimacy, confidence, trust, and reliability. As Gordon pointed out, structures of international governance (like the UN) offer credibility and legitimacy through multilateralism (2007, p. 60). The relationship between credibility and multilateralism is also reciprocal. When organizations like the UN are affected by a scandal, they run the risk of losing credibility, which comes at the expense of its (moral) authority or impartiality, making its member states less inclined to address international crises and issues multilaterally through the UN. Consequently, scandals and other organizational crises can quickly cast the UN into what is called a 'reputational crisis', which implies 'a loss of the common estimation of the good name attributed to the organization' (Booth, 2000, pp. 197–198).

### 2.3. Accounts as instruments of managing blame

Our main goal is to understand how the UN responds to allegations of misconduct. Accounts, as we noted earlier, are the public responses provided in light of scandals which attempt to shield from harm the reputation of the politician or the organization involved. Blame management research shows that there are various types of responses, such as excuses, justifications, denials, and concessions. According to McGraw, 'a public official finds him or herself in a political predicament, where the disapproving audience is making two accusations: (1) a negative or objectionable event has occurred (2) the official is responsible. Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the interaction of the assessment of the negativity of the event, and the acceptance of responsibility. The official can then either choose to accept or deny an event as negative, and he can choose to accept responsibility for the event or not' (McGraw, 2002, pp. 271–272).

With *concessions* the official takes responsibility for an event and acknowledges the event as negative. This strategy tends to be characterized by regret and apologies (McGraw, 2002). A good example of a concession is the response offered during the Dutch

	Accept Event as Negative	Deny Event as Negative
Accept Responsibility	<b>Concession</b>	<b>Justification</b>
Deny Responsibility	<b>Excuse</b>	<b>Denial</b>

Figure from McGraw 2002, p. 272

Figure 1. A Framework for Political Explanations.

Schiphol fire in October 2005, whereby two Cabinet Ministers took responsibility and resigned. Or the Srebrenica case in April 2002, which involved the 1995 massacre in the Balkans, received international attention, led to parliament debates and the resignation of the Kok Government in the Netherlands. A concession is a clear signal that a public official acknowledges his or her wrongdoings and takes corresponding responsibility.

In the case of *denials* there is technically no explanation at all. However, it is still a strategy to manage blame by simply avoiding it. Denying the negative event even occurred and avoiding responsibility can be an effective strategy. A very prominent example of a denial is the finger-wagging statement by President Clinton at a press conference at the White House in January 1998 that he did not have sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky (McGraw, 2002).

The strategy of making excuses involves denying any measure of responsibility for what is admittedly an offensive or negative event. Types of excuses include: mitigating circumstances (from either the past or the present), horizontal or vertical diffusion of responsibility ('it was not just me, but my peers or subordinates also') or simply pleading ignorance ('I did not know that such a thing could happen') (McGraw, 1991, pp. 1135–1136). An example of an excuse is the statement provided by Liberal Democrat MP Mark Oaten in May 2006, who blamed pressure from work, middle-life crisis, and losing his hair in his 30s, for having an affair with a male prostitute.

The fourth type of political accounts are *justifications*, which focus on outcome and claim that the results are not as undesirable as the public thinks, and that blame is hence not warranted. Examples of justification strategies include focusing on current or future benefits, making comparisons with the past, to others or to hypothetical situations, and making appeals to a public's conscience and notions of fairness (McGraw, 1991, p. 1136). In the appeals to conscience, justification strategies also include ones that are rooted in different roles, either the role of delegate ('I acted as my constituency would want me to act) or the role of trustee ('I acted as what I perceived to be the best course of action'). A justification example is the statement by Prime Minister Blair in September 2004

disputing the UN SG Kofi Annan's assertion that the war with Iraq was illegal. According to Blair, the war in Iraq was justified on the basis of shared intelligence about weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Even when WMDs were not found, the war was justified on the argument of bringing down an oppressive dictator while delivering freedom and democracy to the Iraqi people.

There is no fixed recipe on how to respond to a scandal and not every account has a happy ending (McGraw, Best, & Timpone, 1995). McGraw (1991) measured the level of public 'satisfaction' with a variety of accounts in an experimental setting, and showed that 'none of the accounts elicited a great deal of satisfaction' (McGraw, 1991, p. 1141). However, participants showed a general preference for justifications over excuses, among which justifications appealing to normative principles and future benefits fared best. When ranked in order of satisfaction (high to low), justification appealing to normative principles were on top, followed by justifications based on benefits, excuses based on mitigating circumstances, justifications based on comparison, excuses based on diffusing of responsibility, and lastly excuses based on a plea of ignorance (McGraw, 1991, p. 1141).

The McGraw findings suggest that justifications fare better than excuses as blame management strategies in domestic politics. The question now is which accounts are chosen at the organizational level by the UN, whether they are different from those chosen at the individual level by its officials. We expect that certain types of scandals invite a certain type of account. For example, an organization is less prone to assume responsibility for the actions of its officials, if they are engaged in an individual and not an institutional scandal. Thus, the account issued would not be reflecting responsibility, but perhaps condemnation.

An additional issue is to understand under what conditions accounts are *not* provided. Research on political actors and their scandal management techniques suggests that politicians do not always give an account of their actions, but rather prefer to *avoid making a statement*. This strategy of silence is noted by Bennett (1980), who argues that 'a policymaker adheres to public opinion 1/3 of time, ignores it another 1/3 of the time, and manipulates it the other 1/3 of the time' (McGraw, 2002, p. 265).<sup>19</sup> In our work, we mark the instances where we witness a reaction by the individual involved or the institution under which he/she operates, and the instances when no account is provided.

#### 2.4. A study of UN response to scandals

Borrowing insights from the work on political scandals, accounts, and reputation management, we are interested

in the responses provided by the UN organization and the implicated officials in each scandal case. We aim to explain the frequency and type of response offered on the basis of the type, the complexity and the size of the scandal, and the response of the implicated official. Our findings raise issues of transparency, accountability, and leadership that we discuss in our Section 5.

When looking at the act itself, we are interested in determining whether some scandals are more visible and receive greater UN response than others. For this, we adopt Thompson's (1995) typology which divides actions of wrongdoing in individual and institutional types. Individual scandals involve an official who acts for personal gain, performs an undeserved service, whose motive(s) is treated as purely individual (Thompson, 1995, p. 182). However, if the official acts to obtain some political gain, performs a procedurally improper service, and the connection between motive and act is based on institutional tendencies, the scandal is defined as institutional.<sup>20</sup>

The distinction between individual and institutional scandals is relevant here because the UN response may vary from case to case. In an institutional scandal, one needs to take into consideration the dual damage of the individual and the institutional reputations. As we discussed earlier, the UN has various institutionalized offices, such as the Spokesperson of the SG, and the OIOS which operate to ensure transparency and accountability within the organization. In individual scandals we expect at least as many responses from the UN as from the individuals accused of scandal involvement in the event of allegations of negative conduct. In the event of an institutional scandal, we expect heightened UN response because it directly implicates the organization's credibility and reputation of integrity.

The type of scandal can also determine the type of account provided (concessions, excuses, justifications, and denials). Accounts provide an opportunity to the organization and the implicated individual to shape or shift the framing of the act as negative or not, while accepting or deflecting responsibility. Characteristically, in the event of an individual scandal, we expect the UN to provide an excuse and attempt to diffuse responsibility downward to the official involved, in order to avoid further damages to the organization's image. In other words, in scandal allegations, where the role of the organization is minimal, we think that the credibility and standing in the international community would be best preserved by acknowledging the act, but not assuming any further unnecessary responsibility. On the other hand, when the scandal is institutional, we expect the UN to initially offer a concession, taking responsibility for its organizational culture and environment, which facilitated the transgression(s), and potentially initiate punitive

actions. A concession allows the organization to acknowledge the transgression, assume responsibility for the misbehaviour in the eyes of the media elites and the public, and points to a promise of preventing similar scandals in the future.

Scandal type also shapes individual responses and accountability. In the case of an individual scandal which does not implicate the organization, the accused official can not transfer responsibility to the UN. In these cases, we expect individuals to issue a justification, in line with the behaviour or other politicians involved in scandals (McGraw, 1991). Turning to institutional scandals, we expect the official involved to attempt to diffuse responsibility by providing an excuse. The official can appeal to mitigating circumstances ('being the new guy or gal') or blame the organizational structure, procedure and culture to divert allegations regarding the reported transgression. By doing so, the individual would avoid assuming responsibility, and (with any luck) would alleviate any repercussions.

Finally, we are interested in identifying whether the level of the UN response varies systematically on the basis of scandal type. We expect that institutional scandals would be addressed by officers higher in the organizational hierarchy. We also expect that in institutional scandal cases the punishment issued to the implicated officials will be more severe in comparison with individual scandals.

### 3. Methodology

Because scandals are information events made public by the media, in our paper we study the UN response in publicized newspaper stories. To identify the relevant UN scandals, we used Lexis Nexis to search in Anglophone international newspapers in the last 27 years (from 1 January 1980 to 1 January 2007). We used the search keyword 'UN scandal', and our search provided 614 'hits'.<sup>21</sup> These 614 articles report on scandals which involve the UN organization or an individual with close ties to the organization.

These 614 news articles (our sampling units) were further organized according to the specific scandal story. We counted 29 different stories (our context units), and involve 18 private scandals and 11 institutional scandals. They included a mix of high and low profile stories, with most visible the Oil for Food scandal which received extensive coverage and appeared in 404 articles. Other scandal stories received moderate coverage, for example the Sex for Food scandal with 34 articles, the Loose Limbs Lubbers with 24 references, or the UN Catering scandal with 20 references. Our database includes also scandal stories which received only limited attention, for example Kojo's Car scandal with six references, the

Carina Perelli scandal with five references, or the UN Housing scandal with four references, to name a few.

When we unpack each scandal story, particularly in the case of institutional scandals, we find several individuals being implicated in the wrongdoing. For example, in the Sex for Food scandal, we identified six cases (Akushi, Ajello, Annan, Lute, Saiki, and unnamed peacekeepers). Our database identifies a total of 64 political actors (reference units) involved in allegations of misconduct, who could potentially provide one or more accounts.<sup>22</sup> We coded these 64 cases for information regarding how the official handled the allegations of misconduct on an individual basis, and how the organization responded.

More specifically, we coded for 74 variables pertaining to transparency, accountability and leadership. To assess transparency we measured scandal and account visibility, including the span of each scandal and the type of coverage it received (the length, and place of each article). We classified the scandal cases according to their type (individual, institutional) their complexity (whether they involved one or multiple officials) and their size (the number of officials involved). We also noted how many accounts were provided, and whether they were issued by individuals or the institution. To measure accountability, we classified the types of accounts provided by the official as an individual and the UN organization as denials, concessions, excuses (with diffusion of responsibility, with mitigating circumstances, with pleading ignorance), and justifications (with benefits, with comparison, with appeal). We also tracked the specific outcome of each scandal, and whether it led to investigative measures like probes or inquiries, disciplinary action, and even institutional reform. Finally, we coded the scandal impact on the involved official as reprimand, transfer, resignation, termination, criminal prosecution, or fleeing the country. We also noted the cases where the official remained unaffected by the scandal.<sup>23</sup> To measure leadership, we recorded the level of UN response, as response by the SG, Deputy SG (Chief of Staff), Spokesperson of the SG, Director of the pertaining UN office/department or programme, Spokesperson of the pertaining department/office/programme, and unnamed official(s).

### 4. Analysis and findings

#### 4.1. Scandal news and account types: the UN response under attack

First, it is helpful to look at descriptive statistics in order to get an idea of the nature of the data. Looking at the frequency of the publicity of scandals and accounts in the 64 cases, the 39 (60.4%) involve institutional scandals and 25 (39.1%) refer to individual

acts of wrongdoing. Having more institutional scandal cases is expected because institutional scandals receive more intense coverage and can involve more than one person (in 11 institutional scandal stories, there are more than one public officials involved).<sup>24</sup> We also identified 399 accounts, averaging 6.2 accounts per scandal case. About 262 (65.7%) were provided by the UN, and 137 (34.3%) were provided by the implicated individual. In addition, the UN is more likely to offer an account in any specific case (93.6% of the time), in comparison with the implicated individuals (67.2% of the time). Furthermore, a response is more frequent in the context of institutional scandals, where accounts are provided 99% of the time.

First, we review patterns of response contrasting the account of the implicated officials to that of the UN organization. As we can see in Table B1, individuals offer mainly one or two accounts to the media regarding their involvement in a particular scandal case. We also see an interesting split in three almost equally sized groups. While 32.8% avoid making any statement regarding the scandal, 31.3% heed the call made by crisis management strategists and stick to a simple and consistent message (Dilenschneider & Hyde, 1985, p. 37), and 35.9% opt for a combination of accounts, pointing to selective use of more complex crisis management strategies.

Turning to the UN organizational reaction to scandals, we see a different picture. The very low no-account rate of 6.3% indicates that the organization has almost always something to say about the scandals reported in the media. In addition, in approximately three-quarters of all scandal cases (73.4%), the UN opts for a combination of accounts adopting a complicated scandal management strategy. In about 21.9% of the cases, we identified six different accounts provided, while in 15.6% and 12.5% cases we counted combinations of three and four accounts, respectively. In contrast, a single account is provided only in about a fifth of all cases (20.3%). Overall we see that the UN offers more accounts, and more often, in comparison with the individuals implicated in the scandal. This reflects the activity of the organizational mechanisms which are in place to ensure transparency and to maintain a positive relationship with the media. For example, the office of the Spokesperson is a permanent position, ensuring an open line of communication with the media. In contrast, individuals have to rely on their own resources and visibility to secure a spot on a news report. The employment of multiple accounts can be seen as part of a committed blame-management strategy of the UN to diffuse scandal harm, but also as an inevitable consequence of the intense media coverage the UN is subject to. On one hand the transparency objectives managed by the Spokesperson of the SG put the pressure on the organization to respond to scandal

allegations, and on the other the high profile of the organization can generate daily press which brings about more scandal management attempts.

In Table B2, we examine account frequency by scandal type. Of the total 399 accounts reported, about 291 (72.9%) are issued in the context of an institutional scandal, while individual scandal cases contained 108 accounts (27.1%). Looking first at how individuals respond to allegations of misconduct, we see a more active role in the case of individual scandals compared with institutional scandals. In individual scandals about 43.5% of the provided accounts come from the implicated official, whereas in institutional scandals only 30.9% are offered by the individuals involved. As expected, when the nature of the transgression does not allow officials to rely on the UN for assistance or to diffuse blame, they have to fend for themselves, making more media appearances and issuing more responses.

However, it is the UN organization that consistently issues most accounts. In the context of an institutional scandal, 69.1% of the accounts come from the UN organization. This central role of UN response is expected because the organization receives continuous media attention and its mechanisms for transparency respond accordingly. In the event of an individual scandal, the response pattern is more balanced, with 56.5% of all accounts coming from the UN office. Here, the organization is just as responsive to scandal blame as the implicated individuals, because the behaviour of an official can become a threat to the UN organizational image. In such instances, the Secretariat is compelled to provide an account to the accusations implicating its staff, whether this is by distancing itself from the official or by defending him/her.

Taking the above into consideration, and in order to estimate the effects of scandal type, size, complexity and individual response on the likelihood of the UN issuing a public response to a scandal, we estimate an event-count model that covers the accounts offered by the UN organization in the past 20 years. A random effects model is used here to correct for the heterogeneity across different scandals.<sup>25</sup> The random effects model is calculated by taking random draws from a normal distribution in order to estimate the intercepts while accounting for variance within and across scandals.

In the event count model, the dependent variable is a tally of the number of accounts the UN issues in each scandal case. The negative binomial distribution is used because the tally of accounts per scandal is a discrete non-negative variable. In addition, the number of events is small in a given scandal (heavy towards the lower end) so the distribution is not normal, and the probability of an event occurring (in this case, an account) does not have a constant rate of occurrence (thus it is best not to use the Poisson distribution). In the analysis that follows in Table B3 we consider the type, complexity,



and size of scandal and the number of individual accounts provided to explain the number of organizational accounts, and the results tell an interesting story. The predictors that are significant are the scandal type (institutional vs. individual), the complexity of the scandal (single or multiple cases) and the scandal size (number of implicated officials) while the number of individual accounts does not have a significant effect.

Event count coefficients are difficult to interpret so instead we will compare their size and direction. If a scandal is complex and involves many individuals, the UN is significantly more likely to issue an account and this is the strongest predictor of the three. In addition, individual scandals are less likely to generate a response compared with institutional scandals. Also, as the number of the implicated officials increases, so does the number of accounts provided in each particular case by the UN. On the other hand, the number of accounts issued by the implicated official does not have a significant effect.

These findings which are in line with the patterns appearing in the descriptive analyses in Tables B1 and B2, draw an outline of the UN strategy to scandal response. It is the negative events which involve a large number of staff members and implicate the organization, the ones that stimulate enhanced response. This is not a surprise. The intense media attention puts the pressure on the organization and keeps the permanent offices, which operate to ensure transparency and accountability, busy. An account often translates into inquiries and further probing into the event details by the institutional mechanisms for transparency and accountability, which in turn leads to more accounts and can in fact promote a positive reputation of responsiveness and responsibility, even under the shadow of scandals. The insignificant role of the number of individual responses points in the model to an additional point: the UN response does not center around or depend on how intensively its employs respond to a scandal. It is to a large extent an independent blame management process focused primarily on preserving the organizational reputation.

#### 4.2. *What is in an account: selecting explanations in the context of a scandal*

Next, we focus on the types of accounts provided by the UN. We classified the 262 accounts provided by the UN organization, and the 137 accounts provided by individuals, in concessions, justifications, denials, and excuses, using the typology of McGraw. Details of the patterns of response are evident in Table B4.

First, we note that the predominant type of account chosen by both the institution and the individuals is concessions. This type of accounts suggests acceptance of the event as negative, and acceptance of responsibility.

The first account provided by the UN is a concession about 83% of the time, and concessions are the most frequent accounts when multiple accounts are issued.

Because of the strong preference on concessions as a primary account strategy by the UN organization, and the small number of cases in the data where an alternative account is provided, using a multinomial probit model to explain the choice of alternatives to concessions is not of much value here. Below we present detailed descriptive data on the responses of the UN first in all cases, and then by scandal type, and contrasting it to the accounts provided by individual officials.

The UN organization issues a concession response 71.4% of the time. This strong preference of the UN for concessions can be understood in light of the organizational mechanisms at work to ensure transparency, and accountability. The UN operates with institutionalized checks and balances, such as the OIOS or the SG's prerogative to set up independent investigatory committees, and issues inquiries or probes acknowledging the transgression as negative and assuming some responsibility by investigating the matter.<sup>26</sup>

Concessions are also the preferred course of action among officials who choose this response about 28.5% of the time, and as first response about 33% of the time. We think the acceptance of the negative nature of the act and the assumption of responsibility is in part stimulated by the UN Secretariat or SG who often give the wayward individual the option to resign instead of terminating his contract, in order to save face. This was the case when UNHCR Lubbers was given this option by SG Annan. Another example is the scandal of the Volcker Panel's seizure of all computers on the 38th floor of the UN offices, which was quickly followed by the resignations of three senior staff officials, who had their offices on that same floor.

While the UN officials show a preference for concessions in the context of their preemptive resignations, some do not take full responsibility for their actions. Often, the concession and resignation is quickly followed by a denial, addressed either to the Secretariat or to the media. In fact, denials make up the second most frequent account type for individuals (24.1%). This can be seen as a type of crisis management strategy, whereby the official makes a relatively small sacrifice by resigning his/her post in order to appease the audience, but then denies the negative nature of the act and the responsibility that comes with it, in an attempt to save face in the long run.

Denials are not as common among the UN organizational responses, and comprise 11.8% of the total, being a distant second 'most often issued account' by the organization, following concessions. Denials also appear as the most favoured second account (38%), where multiple accounts are provided. This shows that the UN aims to create the image of due diligence and is

reserved with its denials until it actually has to deflect direct attacks on its credibility. This is a wise course of action in crisis management, because by initially conceding there is a problem requiring further investigation, the UN controls the story and the flow of information. Denying the charges from the start would immediately stigmatize the organization. Because tainted reputations are difficult to mend, the UN uses denials very carefully.

A third type of account is excuses, which accept the event as negative but deny responsibility. Both the institution and its officials diffuse responsibility by providing excuses about 11% and 14% of the time, respectively. In these instances, the organization and its officials do not blame each other, but instead attack the media, claiming to have been persecuted relentlessly. A characteristic example is the Oil for Food scandal response of Mark Malloch Brown (Chief of Staff of SG Kofi Annan) who complained about the character assassination performed by conservative elements within the American media, claiming that they were still bitter about SG Annan's condemnation of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003.

#### 4.3. *Individual and institutional response: accountability in two contexts*

Next, we look at the types of accounts in combination with the account agent. In Table B5, we examine the reactions of implicated officials and find interesting differentiations based on scandal type: while denials are the most frequent response by staffers implicated in individual scandals, concessions are their preferred account in an institutional scandal environment.

First we examine the account choice of implicated staff under the individual scandal cases. Denials are provided 27.6% of the time, followed by concessions (19.1%) and then by excuses via a diffusion of responsibility (12.8%). Staffers seem to move from no responsibility and no acceptance of negativity to acceptance of both. This is an interesting contrast. We think that denials are the standard response but the large number of concessions in the individual scandal cases can be a symptom of the 'preemptive resignation' strategy we discussed earlier. The officials have the inclination to deny the wrongdoing, but in a large number of cases due to the nature of the scandal, they are unable to transfer responsibility to the UN, so they concede and let the UN's mechanisms for accountability come into full effect.

When involved in institutional scandals, individuals most often issue concessions (33.3%) and denials (22.2%), followed by excuses by diffusion of responsibility (14.4%). One would expect that individuals would predominantly diffuse responsibility to the organization, but the large number of concessions shows that often

this is not the case. One possible explanation is that the accountability and transparency mechanisms within the UN organization operate full force in the event of institutional scandals, pushing individuals to assume responsibility for the wrongdoing. Faced with an extensive independent inquiry or OIOS audit, officials are not able to simply transfer blame to the UN, which runs its parallel response to the media through the Spokesperson of the SG. Because the UN responds to the accusations in an attempt to shield its institutional reputation from harm, diffusing blame becomes a difficult task for the implicated individuals. The least preferred course of action is silence and not issuing any account (12.2%).

Patterns of individual response are interesting because they contrast with how the UN reacts to scandals. In Table B6 we note that concessions make up again the bulk of responses in both individual (73.8%) and institutional (70.6%) scandals but with much higher frequency. These numbers show that the UN does not distance itself from the negative act. When the scandal involves the institution, we see a more varied type of response with excuses in the form of diffusion of responsibility (11.9%) compared with individual cases (6.6%). Denials are also slightly more frequent in institutional scandals (13.4%), in comparison with individual cases (6.6%), showing that the UN agrees that the actions of its own officials reflect on how the organization is run, and therefore on its own reputation, but attempts to offer an alternative explanation when the institutional reputation is questioned.

The UN tendency to concede particularly in individual scandals is not unwise. By denying association with the actions of its officials, dismissing the acts of wrongdoing, or diffusing responsibility to the implicated individuals, the UN could be judged unfavourably in the eyes of elite and public audiences that expect accountability. A good example is the Sex for Food scandal in June 1997, where peacekeepers sent to a conflict zone engaged in rape and prostituting of refugees. The UN accepted responsibility regarding the behaviour of its officials by association, because the organization hired the staff and placed them to the particular posts, country, and offices. The offices of the OIOS or the Spokesperson for the SG, have as their main task to ensure a reputation of due diligence, transparency and accountability. So, even when a scandal involves an individual staff member, the UN does not wash its hands in innocence, but instead assumes responsibility for its organizational structure and environment.

#### 4.4. *Who is the messenger: level or organizational leadership*

Next, we move to the level of the UN response at allegations of misconduct, which is illustrated in

Table B7. The most frequent sources of accounts are the Director General (DG) or the USG (31%), and the SG (27%), followed by the Spokesperson SG (13%), and the Chief of Staff (10%).

For individual scandals, the DG or the USG of the particular department, where the transgression takes place, share responsibility with the SG. The DG and USG provide an account in 21% of all cases. This shows that it is the department heads that hold primary responsibility over their sections and their personnel behaviour. The Chief of Staff of the SG also has an active account role in 18% of the cases. The mid-to-upper level management of the UN incorporate crisis management in their tasks, and deal with the media to shield the organization from harm caused by individual transgressions. In turn, the SG provides an account in 20% of the individual scandal cases, an indication of the extent to which the UN values transparency and accountability.

Turning to institutional scandals, the DG, USG, and SG assume an even more active role, placing the Chief of Staff in secondary position. The DG and USG issue accounts in 37% of the cases, followed closely by the SG (33%). Here we see evidence of a strategic organizational response. Making the UN senior officials the ones who directly answer the press, instead of delegating such responsibilities to their spokespersons, shows once more that institutional scandals receive higher priority in the UN blame management efforts. Unlike individual scandals, where the transgression is often isolated, in institutional scandals the problem appears, at least in part, as a structural one, holding implications for the UN reputation. In addition, we see that lower tier offices, such as the Spokespersons of the USG and DG's hold a less active role (1%), when the reputation of the organization is compromised under an institutional scandal.

#### 4.5. *Bad acts do not go unpunished: scandal implications following the account*

Next, we examine the punitive actions adopted by the UN following scandals. In Table B8 we see that 35% of the time the UN does not take further action after issuing an account to the media. In about 30% of the cases, the UN follows up with probes and inquiries, especially in the case of institutional scandals (32%). Because institutional scandals often involve a large section of the organization, they trigger a larger number of probes than individual scandals (27%) which centre on the misbehaviour of particular individuals. Institutional scandals also trigger institutional reforms (21%) in an effort to fend off future scandals. Here, the culture and organizational environment are seen as factors that encourage the transgression, allowing a scandal to spread throughout the organization. This makes it

difficult to effectively reprimand all of the officials involved, but it does encourage structural reforms.

In turn, individual scandals generate higher disciplinary action (23%) against the involved personnel, because the events can be easily isolated and blame can be assigned to the individual at fault. Disciplinary actions entail a termination of contracts of employment, forced resignations, stripping of diplomatic immunity, or official reprimands. Such punitive measures make up only 11% of the UN response in institutional scandals.

We are also interested in the type of disciplinary action, and its impact on the careers of the UN staff. In Table B9 we see that scandal damage for the involved officials is more extensive under institutional than individuals scandals. Only 30% of the institutional scandal cases are left without some punitive action towards the employee involved, in contrast to 43% of the individual scandal cases.

The UN 'comes down' more often, but also harder on its staff, when they are implicated in institutional scandals. Note the higher percentage of reprimands (15% vs. 9%), resignations (28% vs. 12%), and criminal persecutions (19% vs. 6%). The Oil for Food scandal in October 2002 is a good example where criminal cases against UN officials were brought before US district and federal courts. In individual scandals, the UN opts frequently for terminations of appointment of the wayward individual (21%).

About 36% of the cases in this table show no punitive action taken against them. How and why some officials manage to shield off the negative scandal impact? Our data cannot offer a definite answer here. We do however offer some possible and complementary explanations. In the scandal research involving public officials, a parallel phenomenon is evident: about one-third of the scandal implicated officials bounce back after scandal allegations without serious damages in their careers. As Capelos (2005) explains, they manage to survive their wrongdoing relatively unscathed, due to their solid reputation.

In addition, in several instances punitive action is delayed and can escape the public eye. As we saw in the case of the Oil for Food scandal, probes and investigations may take months, even years. By that time, the audience is no longer interested in the story as much, which results in less intensified media coverage of assigned punishments. A related factor is organizational constraints. Organizational procedures can add to the delay of a resolution, preventing a 'fast fix'. For example, when UN employees involved in scandals hand in their resignation, the OSG has to formally accept it. The OSG, or SG also have the option of *not* accepting the resignation, often pushing for a more severe penalty. This process takes more time and can give off the impression that the UN is stalling, letting its scandal-involved staff get off too easily.

## 5. Summary and conclusions

Our data allow for three sets of conclusions regarding the responses of the UN organization and its implicated officials in the advent of scandals, reflecting upon the critical components of blame management: transparency, accountability and leadership. These findings are summarized in Table B10.

Regarding transparency, we find that the UN is not shy to respond to scandals. Instead, when its reputation is at stake, it offers a good number and wide range of accounts to the media and their public and elite audiences. Both under institutional and individual scandals, the UN offers at least one account, and it is particularly active in its defense under institutional cases. The office of the Spokesperson for SG has a key role for the responsiveness of the organization. The Spokesperson ensures that the media have a permanent office to contact for clarifications, and issues daily press briefings, guaranteeing a constant level of transparency. Responses to scandals are less frequent by the implicated officials, especially for institutional scandals. We see that when the allegations of wrongdoing are of private rather than institutional nature, individuals are more inclined to offer an account. Because an individual scandal does not allow for blame to be spread around, wayward officials have to fend for themselves in front of the public eye.

Accountability is also highly important. Concessions are the favourite responses in institutional and individual scandals alike, showing that even guilt by association is too great a risk for the UN reputation. Accounts are issued in the majority of the cases, and they are often followed by probes and inquiries showing that the OIOS is not hesitant to take further punitive actions. Though harsh punishment may be not as frequent, the majority of transgressing UN staff receives negative feedback (ranging from reprimands to criminal persecution) as a result of their involvement in a scandal.

When the wrongdoing is institutional, UN staff often opts for resignation, which requires the consent of the organization. In many cases, the SG, or the OSG, do not accept the wayward official's resignation in order to allow internal accountability mechanisms like the OIOS or an Independent Committee to take their due course. Thus, closure of the case can take time, but when concluded the recommendation for punitive action is often harsher than resignation and can lead to termination of a contract.

Scandal and blame management also raise issues of leadership. In the cases reviewed here, we see the senior staffers (the SG, USG, and DG) instead of their spokespersons responding to the media, particularly in institutional cases. This indicates the high symbolic significance of scandal response as evaluated by the organization, but also the procedures and controls in place to preserve and protect the organization's image,

and maintain a transparent relationship with the media. Even in the event of individual scandals, when responsibility can be easily passed down to the involved official, the UN senior staffers offer concessions as responses to the media suggesting responsible leadership.

These findings raise some interesting questions. One potential extension of this work is to explore further *why* concessions are preferred over other types of accounts. Research on public officials and how they respond to scandals suggests that justifications fare better among blame management strategies. Our data show that concessions are not only the preferred accounts of the UN organization, but also the main avenue of response for the staff members involved in scandals. We think the preference of concessions has two complementary explanations. One could be the potential organizational pressures applied on UN staffers to concede and assume blame when involved in scandals that threaten the organizational reputation. Second, although justifications appealing to normative principles or future benefits make sense in electoral contexts when politicians are accountable to their constituency to which they have close ties, in appointed roles they are less useful. In the electoral context a politician can justify negative behaviour pointing to direct benefits or personal influence to the electorate. On the contrary, UN officials are not elected but appointed, and their perceived and actual distance from the scandal audience does not allow for such types of accounts. In-depth interviews with (former) UN officials can shed light to this question and uncover the reasons behind account selection at the individual level.

An additional interesting finding is the high percentage of cases that appear in our data as receiving no punishment (an average of 36%). Our interpretation is that some officials manage to survive the negative scandal impact, perhaps due to their strong reputation or performance record. We also expect some cases to fall out of the media lens due to their extended resolution time and the short attention cycle of most media scandals. It should be noted that the UN is legally unable to criminally prosecute its own officials. Only the member states have the power to do so. Efforts to reform/enhance the UN's capacity for punishment further with regards to its wayward officials have been consistently blocked by its member states. This leads to an interesting dichotomy, whereby the member states wish the UN to 'come down' harder on its transgressing officials, but in the mean time they keep blocking resolutions, which would allow the UN to effectively do so. Further research is needed here to assess which explanation is more appropriate, and to gain further understanding as to when and why some UN officials are able to shield off the negative scandal impact.

A related area that can be further explored is the motivations of the UN staff leading to their preemptive

resignation. Earlier we posed the question of whether this is a self imposed or an organizationally imposed exit strategy in light of a scandal. Case studies of particular scandals that examine internal UN memos and documents, as well as interviews with the implicated officials can shed light to the motivations that drive their behaviour.

In addition, future work can turn to the study of multilateral organizations such as the International Monetary Fund or the World Bank and how they respond in times of scandal. These organizations have particular structures and mandates that make their blame management strategies worth studying. Unlike the UN, the senior staff at these organizations comes predominantly from Western and developed states, suggesting different organizational cultures and also scandal management techniques at the individual and organizational level that are worth exploring.

In closing, our analysis of the UN reaction in times of scandal points to an international organization that is alert to blame and its management, and opens up new avenues of investigation. The commitment to the principles of transparency and accountability defined by the member states in the UN Charters and subsequent reforms might not prevent the occurrence of scandals within the UN, but they function as solid principles that strengthen their management. We close with the hope that this research illuminates some answers and also poses interesting questions that put the study of accountability and blame management at the front lines of research on political institutions.

## Notes

1. These, as outlined at the United Nations Study Center at Yale University (office closed since August 2006), include the advancement of women (Sullivan, 1994; Boutros-Ghali, 1996) economic and social development (Mikesell, 1954; Felice, 1999), human rights (Forsythe, 1985; Buergenthal, Shelton, & Stewart, 2002), humanitarian affairs (Weiss, 2001; Weil, 2008), international law (Kunz, 1953; Higgins, 1965), international trade, peace and disarmament (Finkelstein, 1962; Cheever, 1965), and peacekeeping (Buzan, 1991; Weiss, 1995). In addition other scholars choose to research UN reform efforts in its organizational makeup (notably Security Council Reform), its fiscal policy, and its core duties (Puchala & Coate, 1988; Urquhart & Childers, 1992; Wendell, 1994; Langhorne, 1995; Stiles, 1996; Russett, 1997).
2. The constant global media coverage of both humanitarian crises and the UN's effort to remedy them, also led to a new role for the international media. This role is often referred to as the 'CNN factor' or 'CNN effect', whereby the media's coverage of (humanitarian) crises can compel governments, international organizations, and other non-state actors into action. As such, the international media during the 1990s became a factor in

the formulation of foreign policy, able to force governments and the international organizations into (and out of) conflict zones (Krasno, 2004, pp. 247–248).

3. Although accounts are not only offered after a scandal, here we are interested in accounts that are related to scandals. Accounts are offered by politicians also to enlist public support for their policy initiatives or to respond to a non-scandalous event that is perceived by their constituency as negative (McGraw, 2002, pp. 268–269).
4. For more information see: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6550995.stm>
5. For more information see: [http://www.iht.com/articles/2003/08/07/edmerritt\\_ed3\\_.php](http://www.iht.com/articles/2003/08/07/edmerritt_ed3_.php).
6. For a comprehensive study of the impact of other types of crises, such as natural disasters, riots, or terrorist attacks on governments' responses, the interested reader should refer to *Governing After Crisis* (by Boin, McConnell, & 't Hart, 2008). The book hosts illuminating case studies which offer valuable insights on governments' tactics in times of disasters and crises, focusing on restoration of stability, blame management and framing of the event.
7. We thank the anonymous reviewer of our article for bringing this point to our attention.
8. For more information see: <http://www.un.org/aboutun/unhistory>
9. For more details on the various organs and their respective powers, see <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html> Chapters III–XV
10. For example, the DPKO of the Secretariat deals with the administrative part, or the execution, of a peacekeeping operation, whereas the Security Council deals with the political side (the formulation of UN policy and the actual mandate).
11. For more information see: <http://www.un.org/sg/sgrole.shtml>
12. For the webpage of the Spokesperson of the Secretary General see: <http://www.un.org/News/ossg/index.shtml>
13. For the webpage of the Office of Internal Oversight Services see: <http://www.un.org/Depts/oios>
14. For more information see <http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/mission.htm>
15. For a relevant argument see the discussion by Higgins and Stecklow (2008) in the *Wall Street Journal Europe*.
16. For more details see Chapter XV of the UN Charter at <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html>
17. For more information see <http://www.un.org/documents/st.htm>
18. It is important to make a distinction here between scandals, and corruption, the immoral acts and 'behavior which deviates from the formal duties of a public role because of private-regarding (personal, close family, private clique), pecuniary, or status gains; or violates rules against the exercise of certain types of private-regarding influence' (Nye, 1967, p. 13). Though scandals and corruption seem interchangeable, they differ on particular points. First, scandals, unlike corruption, incorporate events, which are not necessarily evil or corrupt, but do shock and upset the public. Sexual scandals, for example, often tend to not involve any

- act of corruption (Garment, 1991). Second, scandals are publicized events (often highly) by the media and have an audience, whereas corruption does not necessarily require media attention, or the prerequisite of a wide (public) audience. Third, scandals involve the assignment of blame, an element not necessary in corruption cases. Fourth, scandals are measured by the impact and damage inflicted on the implicated individuals or organizations, whereas acts of corruption are measured by their seriousness. In short scandals can, but do not necessarily, include corruptive acts, and not all corruptive acts become scandals. For a detailed discussion see Capelos (2002).
19. There are other manipulative strategies such as the previously mentioned *going public* and *crafted talk* to influence the opinions of the electorate about politicians themselves and their respective policies. *Going public* involves all activities, in which a politician engages to promote him or herself and his or her policies, from grassroots appearances to televised debates. *Crafted talk* on the other hand is based on opinion polls, whereby politicians shape or craft their policies and statements to *appear responsive* to the wishes of the public (McGraw, 2002, pp. 266–268).
  20. There are according to Thompson (1995), impure scandal cases that contain a combination of individual and institutional elements. These cases are more inviting of interpretation and allow the manipulation of the frame and the definition of the scandal by the actors involved.
  21. We decided against using the UN's official press statements as the primary source of information on scandals and accounts because although the Office of the Spokesperson makes daily press statements regarding a wide variety of topics, including the occasional mention of a UN official's transgression, this does not necessarily imply that a press statement will receive media attention and become a scandal. We also decided against performing searches with keywords like 'UN fraud' or 'UN corruption' because they do not necessarily imply a scandal. For a detailed discussion regarding the differences between corruption and scandals see Capelos (2002).
  22. For a detailed list of the cases included in the dataset, please refer to Appendix A.
  23. A detailed list of all variables, their classifications, and coding are available by the authors upon request.
  24. The heightened media focus on institutional scandals is not surprising, given the expansion of the tasks and the complexity involving the UN after the Cold War. In the last 20 years, the UN has made its mark with regards to collective security. An increase in its peacekeeping missions, as well as new tasks/branches with regards to its traditional expertise in development (due to globalization) and new threats (AIDS, tuberculosis), contribute to the UN's heightened profile (Cain, Postlewait, & Thompson, 2004). The newfound complexity of tasks within the UN creates an environment, where corruption and fraud can surface to the public eye more easily.
  25. Using a fixed-effects model would require adding dummy variables for each scandal unit to account for the heterogeneity across scandals. As the number of scandals is 29, and we have only 64 observations, we would lose many degrees of freedom and the estimates would be inefficient (Green, Kim, & Yoon, 2001). Thus a random effects model is preferred here.
  26. The assessment of the efficiency of the checks and balances mechanisms are beyond the scope of our work. It is interesting to note that there have been criticisms that inquiries yield little to no results, and sometimes even ignite controversy as to their respective impartiality. For example, the Volcker Panel, which investigated the Oil for Food programme, was made up of three close acquaintances of SG Kofi Annan. When the final report of the Independent Inquiry Committee was released, one of the investigators (Robert Parton) subsequently resigned, claiming that the three panel members gave SG Kofi Annan preferential treatment despite the incriminating evidence found against him in the audits.

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## Appendix A. List of UN scandals, implicated officials, and date of report

Table A1.

Case	Case description and date	Scandal (number of cases) and type	Mentions in number of articles
1	Army of Lovers Corruption: implicating unnamed UN officials; December 1980	Army of Lovers (1) Institutional	1
2	Frequent Flyer: implicating Jean Pierre Hocké; Date: December 1989	Frequent Flyer (1) Individual	3
3	World Health Organization: implicating Nakajima; May 1995	World Health Organization (1) Individual	1
4	Autocrat: implicating Edouard Saouma; May 1995	Autocrat (1) Institutional	1
5	UNICEF Kenya: implicating unnamed UN officials; May 1995	UNICEF Kenya (1) Individual	3
6	Saint Lucia: implicating Charles Fleming; July 1997	Saint Lucia (1) Institutional	6
7	Guatemalan Rebel: Jean Arnault; May 1997	Guatemalan Rebel (1) Institutional	1
8	Sex for Food: implicating Unnamed Peacekeepers; June 1997	Sex for Food (7)	34
9	Sex for Food: implicating Akushi; June 1997		
10	Sex for Food: implicating Ajello; June 1997		
11	Sex for Food: implicating Kofi Annan; June 1997		
12	Sex for Food: implicating Lute; June 1997		
13	Sex for Food: implicating Saiki; June 1997		
14	Sex for Food: implicating Malloch Brown; June 1997		
15	Fraud Boesak: implicating Allen Boesak; March 1999	Fraud Boesak (1) Individual	1
16	UNSCOM Spying: implicating Butler; July 1999	UNSCOM Spying (3) Institutional	2
17	UNSCOM Spying: implicating Ritter; July 1999		
18	UNSCOM Spying: Kofi Annan; July 1999		
19	UNHCR Extortion Kenya: unnamed UN officials; October 2002	UNHCR Extortion Kenya (1) Individual	1
20	Oil for Food: implicating Kofi Annan; October 2002	Oil for Food (22) Institutional	404
21	Oil for Food: implicating Kojo Annan; October 2002		
22	Oil for Food: implicating Benon Sevan; October 2002		
23	Oil for Food: implicating John Ruggie; October 2002		
24	Oil for Food: implicating Teklay Afeworki; October 2002		
25	Oil for Food: implicating Iqbal Riza; October 2002		
26	Oil for Food: implicating Jean Pierre Halbwachs; October 2002		
27	Oil for Food: implicating Catherine Bertini; October 2002		
28	Oil for Food: implicating Peter Hansen; October 2002		
29	Oil for Food: implicating Maurice Critchley; October 2002		
30	Oil for Food: implicating Boutros Boutros Ghali; October 2002		
31	Oil for Food: implicating Joseph Stephanides; October 2002		
32	Oil for Food: implicating Louise Frechette; October 2002		
33	Oil for Food: implicating Maurice Strong; October 2002		
34	Oil for Food implicating Christine Mayo; October 2002		
35	Oil for Food: implicating Ron Cleminson; October 2002		
36	Oil for Food: implicating Alexander Yakolev; October 2002		
37	Oil for Food: Reid Morden; October 2002		
38	Oil for Food: implicating Vladimir Kuznetsov; October 2002		
39	Oil for Food: implicating Jean-Bernard Merimee; October 2002		
40	Oil for Food: implicating Paul Volcker; October 2002		
41	Oil for Food: implicating Mark Malloch Brown; October 2002		
42	Rwanda War Criminal: implicating Mbarushimana; October 2002	Rwanda War Criminal (1) Individual	2
43	Sevan in Afghanistan: implicating Benon Sevan; October 2004	Sevan in Afganistan (1) Institutional	2
44	Loose Limbs Lubbers: implicating Ruud Lubbers; October 2004	Loose Limbs Lubbers (1) Individual	24
45	Missing Black Box: implicating unnamed UN officials; October 2004	Missing Black Box (1) Institutional	1
46	Kosovo Embezzlement: implicating unnamed UN officials; October 2004	Kosovo Embezzlement (1) Individual	1
47	Watchdog Nair: Dileep Nair; December 2004		
48	Watchdog Nair: implicating Barbara Dixon; December 2004	Watchdog Nair (2) Individual	7
49	WMO: implicating Muhammad Hassan; February 2005	WMO (1) Individual	4



Table A1. (Contd.)

Case	Case description and date	Scandal (number of cases) and type	Mentions in number of articles
50	Carina Perelli: implicating Carina Perelli; March 2005	Carina Perelli (1) Individual	5
51	WIPRO: unnamed UN officials; June 2005	WIPRO (1) Institutional	2
52	Procurement/peacekeeping: implicating Alexander Yakolev; June 2005		
53	Procurement/Peacekeeping: implicating Andrew To; June 2005	Procurement/Peacekeeping (3) Institutional	10
54	Procurement/Peacekeeping: implicating Bahel; June 2005		
55	Zimbabwean peacekeepers: unnamed UN peacekeepers; February 2005	Zimbabwean Peacekeepers (1) Institutional	2
56	Malloch Brown House: implicating Mark Malloch Brown; June 2005	Malloch Brown House (1) Individual	4
57	Kojo's Car: implicating Kojo Annan; September 2005	Kojo's Car (1) Individual	6
58	UN Catering: implicating Vladimir Kuznetsov; October 2005	UN Catering (3) Institutional	20
59	UN Catering: implicating Alexander Yakolev; October 2005		
60	UN Catering: implicating Nane Marie Annan; October 2005		
61	Kofi's Prize: implicating Kofi Annan; June 2006	Kofi's Prize (1) Individual	2
62	UN Housing: implicating Louise Frechette; August 2006	UN Housing (2) Individual	4
63	UN Housing: implicating Jean-Marie Guehenno; August 2006		
64	Somalia Filing Cabinet: implicating Doug Mason; June 2006	Somalia Filing Cabinet (1) Individual	1

## Appendix B

Table B1. Number of Accounts Given by the UN Organization and Implicated Officials and in All Scandals

	UN organization	Implicated officials
No account given	4 (6.3%)	21 (32.8%)
1 Account given	13 (20.3%)	20 (31.3%)
2 Accounts given	7 (10.9%)	12 (18.8%)
3 Accounts given	10 (15.6%)	3 (4.7%)
4 Accounts given	8 (12.5%)	1 (1.6%)
6 Accounts give	14 (21.9%)	3 (4.7%)
7 Accounts given	4 (6.3%)	1 (1.6%)
9 Accounts given	3 (4.7%)	2 (3.1%)
12+ accounts given	1 (1.6%)	1 (1.6%)
Total cases	64 (100%)	64 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts of cases, percentages in parentheses. UN, United Nations.

Table B2. Total Number of Accounts given by the UN Organization Implicated Officials in Individual and Institutional Scandals

	Number of accounts in individual scandals	Number of accounts in institutional scandals
Offered by UN Organization	61 (56.5%)	201 (69.1%)
Offered by Implicated Official	47 (43.5%)	90 (30.9%)
Total	108 (100%)	291 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts, percentages in parentheses. Because some cases contain more than one account, the total here is not 64 (as the number of cases). UN, United Nations.

Table B3. Determinants of Number of UN Accounts – Event Count Model

Scandal type	-.248 <sup>+</sup> (.144)
Scandal size	.065 <sup>***</sup> (.007)
Scandal complexity	.494 <sup>**</sup> (.189)
Number of individual accounts	.009 (.011)
Constant	.349* (.176)
Log likelihood	-108.155
N	64
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	.298
Pseudo adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.259

Note:

<sup>+</sup>p < .10, \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01, \*\*\*p < .001.

Parameter estimates are negative binomial regression coefficients, robust standard errors in parentheses. The dependent variable is counts of accounts offered by the UN. Pseudo R<sup>2</sup> and pseudo adjusted R<sup>2</sup> computed with *fitstat*.

UN, United Nations.

Table B4. Types of Account Offered by the UN Organization and Implicated Officials

	UN organization	Implicated officials
Concession	187 (71.4%)	39 (28.5%)
Denial	31 (11.8%)	33 (24.1%)
Excuses: diffusion of responsibility	28 (10.7%)	19 (13.9%)
Excuses: mitigating circumstances	1 (.4%)	3 (2.2%)
Excuses: pleading ignorance	4 (1.5%)	3 (2.2%)
Justification: benefits	1 (.4%)	6 (4.4%)
Justification: comparison	1 (.4%)	3 (2.2%)
Justification: appeal	4 (1.5%)	10 (7.3%)
No Account given	5 (1.9%)	21 (15.2%)
Total	262 (100%)	137 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts, percentages in parentheses. Because some cases contain more than one account, the total here is not 64 (as the number of cases).  
UN, United Nations.

Table B5. Types of Account Given by Implicated Officials in Individual and Institutional Scandals

	Individual scandal	Institutional scandal
Denial	13 (27.6%)	20 (22.2%)
Concession	9 (19.1%)	30 (33.3%)
Excuses: diffusion of responsibility	6 (12.8%)	13 (14.4%)
Excuses: mitigating circumstances	2 (4.3%)	1 (1.1%)
Excuses: pleading ignorance	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)
Justification: benefits	2 (4.3%)	4 (4.4%)
Justification: comparison	0 (0%)	3 (3.3%)
Justification: appeal	5 (10.6%)	5 (5.6%)
No account given	10 (21.3%)	11 (12.2%)
Total	47 (100%)	90 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts, percentages in parentheses. Because some cases contain more than one account, the total here is not 64 (as the number of cases).

Table B6. Type of Accounts Given by the UN Organization in Individual and Institutional Scandals

	Individual scandal	Institutional scandal
Concession	45 (73.8%)	142 (70.6%)
Denial	4 (6.6%)	27 (13.4%)
Excuses: diffusion of responsibility	4 (6.6%)	24 (11.9%)
Excuses: mitigating circumstances	1 (1.6%)	0 (0%)
Excuses: pleading ignorance	2 (3.3%)	2 (1.0%)
Justification: benefits	0 (0%)	1 (.5%)
Justification: comparison	0 (0%)	1 (.5%)
Justification: appeal	2 (3.3%)	2 (1.0%)
No account given	3 (4.9%)	2 (1.0%)
Total	61 (100%)	201 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts, percentages in parentheses. Because some cases contain more than one accounts, the total here is not 64 (as the number of cases).  
UN, United Nations.

Table B7. Level of the UN Organization Response to Scandals

	Individual scandal	Institutional scandal	Total
SG	11 (20%)	26 (33%)	37 (27%)
Chief of staff	10 (18%)	3 (4%)	13 (10%)
Spokesperson SG	8 (14%)	10 (13%)	18 (13%)
DG/USG	12 (21%)	30 (37%)	42 (31%)
Spokesperson DG/USG	9 (16%)	1 (1%)	10 (7.5%)
Unnamed official	4 (7%)	6 (8%)	10 (7.5%)
No response	2 (4%)	3 (4%)	5 (4%)
Total	56 (100%)	79 (100%)	135 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts, percentages in parentheses. Because some cases contain more than one levels of organizational response, the total here is not 64 (as the number of cases).  
UN, United Nations; DG, Director General; USG, Under Secretary General; SG, Secretary General.

Table B8. UN Organization Response in Individual and Institutional Scandals

	Individual scandal	Institutional scandal	Total
Statement/account	22 (34%)	36 (34%)	58 (35%)
Probe/inquiry	17 (27%)	33 (32%)	50 (30%)
Disciplinary action	15 (23%)	11 (11%)	26 (15%)
Institutional reform	9 (14%)	22 (21%)	31 (18%)
No response	1 (2%)	2 (2%)	3 (2%)
Total	64 (100%)	104 (100%)	168 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts, percentages in parentheses. Because some cases contain more than one organizational responses, the total here is not 64 (as the number of cases).  
UN, United Nations.

Table B9. Impact on Implicated Officials in Individual and Institutional Scandals

	Individual scandal	Institutional scandal	Total
Reprimand	3 (9%)	8 (15%)	11 (13%)
Transfer	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1%)
Resignation	4 (12%)	15 (28%)	19 (22%)
Termination	7 (21%)	2 (4%)	9 (10%)
Criminal persecution	2 (6%)	10 (19%)	12 (13%)
Flee the country	2 (6%)	2 (4%)	4 (5%)
No action/unaffected	14 (43%)	17 (30%)	31 (36%)
Total	33 (100%)	54 (100%)	87 (100%)

Note: Numbers are counts, percentages in parentheses. Because some cases contain more than one impact examples, the total here is not 64 (as the number of cases).

Table B10. Summary of Findings

	Account by individual staff	Account by UN organization
Number of accounts	137 (34.3%)	262 (65.7%)
Issues an account	77% of the time	93.7% of the time
Frequency of accounts by scandal type and agent		
Individual scandal	43.5% of accounts	56.5% of accounts
Institutional scandal	30.9% of accounts	69.1% of accounts
Combination of accounts	35.9% of the time	73.4% of the time
Most frequent account	Concessions (28.5% of the time)	Concessions (71.4% of the time)
Most frequent first account	Concession (33% of the time)	Concessions (83% of the time)
Most frequent second account	Denial (24.1% of the time)	Denial (11.8% of the time)
Type of account by scandal type and agent		
Individual scandal	Denial (27.6% of the time)	Concession (73.8% of the time)
Institutional scandal	Concession (33.3% of the time)	Concession (70.6% of the time)
Leadership		
Individual scandal	DG or USG	
Institutional scandal	DG and USG	
Probes and inquiries	27% of the time	32% of the time
Disciplinary action	23% of the time	11% of the time
Damages	57% of the time	70% of the time

Note:

DG, Director General; USG, Under Secretary General; UN, United Nations.

## Appendix C

### UN-related websites

Department of Public Information/News and Media Division (2006) *Press Release ORG/1469*, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/org1469.doc.htm> (accessed 6/May/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2005) *Basic Facts About the United Nations: Charter of the United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/aboutun/charter/index.html> (accessed 13/October-2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2005) *Basic Facts About the United Nations: History of the United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/aboutun/unhistory> (accessed 13/October-2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2004) *Basic Facts About the United Nations: Secretariat*, <http://www.un.org/documents/st.htm> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *Deputy Secretary General: the Post*, <http://www.un.org/sg/deputysg.shtml> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *Office of the Spokesperson of the Secretary-General*, <http://www.un.org/News/oss/index.shtml> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2006) *References Reports and Materials: Investing in the United Nations for a Stronger Organization Worldwide*, <http://www.un.org/reform/investinginun/report.shtml> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2006) *References Reports and Materials: Reform at the United Nations*, <http://www.un.org/reform/investinginun/report.shtml> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *Senior Management Group*, <http://www.un.org/sg/management.shtml> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/Peace and Security Section (2006) *Special and Personal Representatives and Envoys of the Secretary-General*, <http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/SRSG/index.htm> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *The Role of the Secretary General*, <http://www.un.org/sg/sgrole.shtml> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services*, <http://www.un.org/Depts/oios> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services: Inspection*, <http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/pages/ied.html> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services: Mission*, <http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/pages/mission.html> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2007) *United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services: Reporting*, <http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/reporting.htm> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Department of Public Information/UN Web Services Section (2005) *UN Millennium Development Goals*, <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals> (accessed 13/10/2007)

Independent Inquiry Committee into the Oil for Food Program (2006) *Documents*, <http://www.iic-offp.org/documents.htm> (accessed 13/October/2007)

Joint Inspection Unit of the United Nations System (2004) *Joint Inspection Unit*, <http://www.unjiu.org> (accessed 13/October/2007)

United Nations Board of Auditors (2006) *UN Board of Auditors*, <http://www.unsystem.org/auditors> (accessed 13/October/2007)

United Nations General Assembly (2000) *GA Resolution 55/2: UN Millennium Declaration*, <http://www.un.org/millennium/declaration/ares552e.htm> (accessed 13/October/2007)

United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (2004) *Annual Report 2004*, [http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/a59\\_359.pdf](http://www.un.org/Depts/oios/a59_359.pdf) (accessed 13/October/2007)

### *Non-UN websites*

Avni, B./The New York Sun (2005) *An Annan Deputy is a Soros Tenant*, <http://www.nysun.com/article/6697> (Accessed 13/October/2007)

Bone, J./The Times Online (2005) *Senators Aim to Break Code of Silence on UN Scandal*, [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us\\_and\\_americas/article387596.ece](http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/us_and_americas/article387596.ece) (Accessed 13/October/2007)

British Broadcasting Corporation News (2007) *Pressure grows on World Bank Boss*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6550995.stm> (Accessed 29/April/2007)

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