

Throwing the bum out: When should scandal-hit politicians stage a come back?

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As Anthony Weiner enters the New York mayoral race two years after scandal forced him from office, a new study in *Social Science Quarterly* explores the lingering effect of scandals and asks how long a politician need wait before hitting the come-back trail.

Using research into 'brand crisis' this study is the first systematic test of the idea that scandals can linger in voters' minds and damage a [politician's reelection campaign](#). The authors find evidence that this lingering effect ensures politicians do not return to their pre-scandal predicted margins of victory until four to six years after the event.

Voter turnout was also found to increase following a scandal, but rather than an increase in votes for the incumbent, this was linked to the voters' desire to 'kick the bum out.'

However, if a politician succeeds in surviving a reelection bid despite a scandal, they can expect to recover two-thirds of their support within one cycle, moving them out of the '[danger zone](#)' into which their scandal pushed them.

"Even though scandals are one of the few ways incumbents become vulnerable at the [ballot box](#), challengers must strike while the iron is hot," said Dr Rodrigo Praino. "Scandal-ridden incumbents do lose votes in the election immediately after the scandal, but those who manage to stay in office regain the ground that they have lost in only two election cycles. Coupled with the fact that the elections right after the scandal

tend to present slightly higher levels of voter turnout, challengers have a very short, but clear, window of opportunity to convince voters to 'throw the bum out'."

More information: Rodrigo Praino, Daniel Stockemer, Vincent G. Moscardelli, 'The Lingering Effect of Scandals in Congressional Elections: Incumbents, Challengers, and Voters', *Social Science Quarterly*, June 2013, [DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.12046](https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12046)

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