

## **Italians, Politics and Scandals: Finally Something to be Proud of**

Gianni Russo (July 25, 2013)



An American study conducted by an Italian political scientist unveils the impact of political scandals on the re-election prospects of politicians. While the American and international media are fascinated by this study, the Italians have entirely ignored it--though they are the ones who would have most to learn from it.

Anthony Weiner and Eliot Spitzer have transformed the next New York City elections into an incredible media event. While both formerly successful politicians have decided to run for office a few years after very colorful—to say the least—scandals drove them out of office, creating a media



storm, we have chosen to focus on the Italian side of this story.

Italy has sadly become famous for politics and scandals due to former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, but there is also a fascinating Italian component to the Weiner/Spitzer story, one that, this time, should make Italians proud.

Major American media outlets, in an endless quest to understand whether Weiner, Spitzer or any other politician involved in scandals has a real shot at getting elected again, have been quoting a [study](#) [2] published last June by Social Science Quarterly. This original study was led by [Rodrigo Praino](#) [3], an Italian political scientist and Fulbright scholar at the University of Connecticut, together with [Vincent G. Moscardelli](#) [4], an Italian-American political scientist also at UCONN, and Daniel Stockemer from the University of Ottawa. The study, according to [The Times of India](#) [5], answers a question that has been bothering politicians for centuries: how short is public memory?

As the [Pew Research Center](#) [6] notes, Praino and his colleagues showed that, among Members of Congress involved in scandals, only 49% actually manage to get re-elected, against an astonishing 87% of those not involved in scandals. Within the 49% of survivors, Dylan Matthews notes in the [Washington Post](#) [7], the study shows that once you “control for other factors, like the amount spent on the campaign by each side, the national tilt of that year’s election, and the partisanship of the House member’s district,” a scandal “reduces a member of Congress’s margin of victory by about 14.5 points, on average.” This means that even politicians who survive a scandal have a harder time getting votes from the public. And this is not even the entire story. In fact, the study also finds that, on average, the “lingering whiff of scandal lasts about 4 years,” as the [Pacific Standard](#) [8] noted. Consequently, states the [Huffington Post](#) [9], it is fair to say that, according to political science, the timing is right for Spitzer and, perhaps, even for Weiner.

While the American media is fascinated by this study and the international media, including publications from [Canada](#) [10] and the [Czech Republic](#) [11], has used it to try to understand the consequences of their own political scandals, the Italian media has entirely ignored it. Luckily, Rodrigo Praino is also active in the study of [Italian politics abroad](#) [12] and in the analysis of [Italian-American politics](#) [13], which helped bring this work to our attention. We hope that he decides soon to expand his study to a complete analysis of scandals in Italian and Italian-American politics - he would certainly have enough data to draw from, thanks in large part to Mr. Berlusconi!

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### Links

[1] <http://ftp.iitaly.org/files/weinerspitzer1374730826jpg>

[2] <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ssqu.12046/pdf>

[3] <http://www.polisci.uconn.edu/people/grads/praino.php>

[4] <http://www.polisci.uconn.edu/people/faculty/faculty.php?name=moscardelli>

[5] [http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-06-24/india/40165380\\_1\\_anthony-weiner-scandal-politicians](http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2013-06-24/india/40165380_1_anthony-weiner-scandal-politicians)

[6] <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2013/07/18/the-price-that-politicians-pay-for-scandals/>

[7] <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/07/08/we-asked-science-if-eliot-spitzer-could-win-it-said-yes/>

[8] <http://www.psmag.com/politics/that-lingering-whiff-of-scandal-lasts-about-four-years-60492/>

[9] [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/08/spitzer-comptroller-poll\\_n\\_3563250.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/08/spitzer-comptroller-poll_n_3563250.html)



[10] <http://www.ipolitics.ca/2013/06/25/scandal-not-always-a-block-to-re-election-study/>

[11] <http://www.novinky.cz/zahranicni/amerika/305193-za-jak-dlouho-po-skandalu-se-smi-politici-vratit.html>

[12] <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/maney/itc/2012/00000030/00000002/art00003>

[13] <http://www.barnesandnoble.com/w/italian-signs-american-politics-ottorino-cappelli/1114016251?ean=9780970340382>