

# Forgiving Political Sex Scandals

Do politicians – the leaders and lawmakers of our country – need to have good moral character? Sex scandals used to end political careers, but within the past few years, several scandal-tainted politicians have made comebacks. In 2009, Mark Sanford admitted to having an extramarital affair with an Argentinian woman and was under investigation for using government funds for his trips to see her. Sanford won a special election in 2013 to become a South Carolina House Representative.<sup>1</sup> Anthony Weiner, a married man infamous for sexting with other women on Twitter, is running for mayor in New York City.<sup>2</sup> Former New York Governor Eliot Spitzer, who allegedly used tax dollars on travel and hotel rooms to meet with prostitutes, is running for New York City Comptroller.<sup>3</sup> On the *The Colbert Report*, July 18, 2013, Stephen Colbert asked Eliot Spitzer if it seems that voters are more forgiving than they used to be and if they were, would this forgiveness signal “progress for our country or the slow decay of our moral values?”<sup>4</sup>

Historically, European politicians survive scathing sex scandals. This implies that many Europeans believe that how a politician acts in the bedroom does not affect how he or she governs. Many U.S. voters claim to feel similarly. When given the choice between voting for a candidate with the same political values but lacking in moral character and a candidate with different political values, many U.S. voters say they will choose the candidate with the same political values despite moral character.

## STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Should personal character be taken into consideration when electing public officials?
2. To what extent, if at all, should sexual indiscretions of politicians be forgiven?
3. Is forgiveness of sexual indiscretions a demonstration of social progress or an erosion of ethics and values?
4. Should scandal-tainted politicians run for public office even at the expense of their political party's potential success at the polls?

---

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/08/us/south-carolina-election-a-referendum-on-sanford.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/08/us/south-carolina-election-a-referendum-on-sanford.html?_r=0)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2013/07/24/pressure-mounts-on-anthony-weiner-to-quit-nyc-mayoral-race-after-sexting/>

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/12/spitzer-prostitute-detail\\_n\\_91116.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2008/03/12/spitzer-prostitute-detail_n_91116.html)

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.colbertnation.com/full-episodes/thu-july-18-2013-jeff-bridges>

