

Political Analysis

Volume 16 *Volume XVI* (2014)

Article 2

2015

Recovering from Political Scandal: Why Weiner Failed and Barry Stays Strong

PJ Argento

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/pa>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Argento, PJ (2015) "Recovering from Political Scandal: Why Weiner Failed and Barry Stays Strong," *Political Analysis*: Vol. 16 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarship.shu.edu/pa/vol16/iss1/2>

Recovering from Political Scandal: Why Weiner Failed and Barry Stays Strong

PJ Argento

Introduction

September 10th, 2013, Anthony Weiner, aka “Carlos Danger” (his sexting alias), a former New York Congressman and Democratic mayoral candidate, gave an angry farewell, flipping the bird to reporters as he got into his car to leave after learning he lost the primary. It was a tragic ending for Weiner. When he first entered the race, he appeared to actually be in the lead in the primary. That all changed after a woman came forward and revealed that he was involved in another sexting scandal. It was the same scandal that led to his resignation from the House of Representatives a few years earlier. Almost immediately, Weiner’s approval ratings dropped to such low levels that his defeat was practically prewritten.

In 2008, in spite of his five scandals during his tenure in political office, Marion Barry, former mayor of the District of Columbia and current member of the City Council, representing Ward 8, managed to win in a landslide reelection. Even after his 1990 FBI bust, getting caught smoking crack-cocaine and being caught in several smaller illegal actions, he continued to win elections from 1992-2008 without defeat for both city council and mayor. In every case, he won with roughly 50% of the vote in the Democratic primaries and then in a landslide in the general elections. To this day, he remains arguably the most popular DC politician.

One man did something unethical and it destroyed his entire political career. Another was convicted of illegal activities but remained consistently one of, if not the, most popular politician in Washington, D.C. How did this happen? Why did Anthony Weiner suffer so greatly and pay such a high price for his scandals while Marion Barry continued to succeed politically and win with such overwhelming approval? What determines whether or not a politician can succeed in reelection after suffering from scandal?

After doing extensive research, four basic factors emerge that explain how a candidate will most likely be able to recover from political scandal. One is his honesty about the scandal, whether or not they lied can determine whether or not a second scandal can occur. The next is the candidate's political record. Accomplishments from the past as a politician can affect whether or not the voters will give a candidate the benefit of the doubt. Another factor is the politician's connection to his constituents, as people are more likely to forgive someone to whom they feel close. Lastly, the final factor is type of scandal. Different people may have differing opinions about what type of scandals are forgivable and which are not.

Based on these findings, Anthony Weiner and Marion Barry's political careers will be examined from the year 2008 to the year 2013 to see how these factors played in to their political campaigns and their attempt to recover from political scandals. These five years were the ones examined because they were the years of both men's most recent scandals and political campaigns.

In order to gather the most important data possible for this study, multiple sources were examined. The majority of these stories came from two of the largest newspapers: *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. However, a fair number of them also came from the online newspaper, *The Huffington Post*. These articles were the most valuable because they contained some of the most up to date stories about the two politicians being examined and they helped to confirm the validity of the information in each article. Other newspapers were used as well to gather more information, such as *The Daily Beast*, *New York Daily News*, and others. Also examined to help gather information for these case studies were official records such as Weiner's congressional voting record and the Washington, D.C. census. These examined the political records of the two politicians and the demographics of their constituents so that those factors also

could be studied for their effects. Looking through all this information helped to clarify how these factors made Weiner an unsuccessful example and Barry a successful example of how to recover from political scandal.

Using these case studies of Weiner and Barry it will be possible to uncover both politicians' political strategies for reelection, as well as the effect each factor had on their success or failure. From there, this paper will examine why these factors are so critical in determining one's recoverability from scandal.

There are larger questions, though, that can be analyzed through this study. Do these factors apply to all politicians or just in these two cases? Does one factor have more of an effect than another or do they all carry the same weight? Does the particular situation and its circumstances determine the amount these factors affect a politician's chances for reelection? Is there a pattern that can be discovered through examining the campaigns of Anthony Weiner and Marion Barry?

Honesty about Scandal

It goes without saying that most Americans expect their politicians to be honest. They want the people who are representing them and making policies for their nation to be trustworthy. Thus, when politicians not only get caught in a political scandal, but are caught lying about it, they are then faced with not one, but two scandals. Not only that, but it creates a vastly different issue to be dealt with. In the case of honesty, the politician may be able to play-off the incident as one-time incident, error in judgment, or mistake. People might be willing to forgive that as all people make mistakes at some point. Lying, on the other hand, takes away the people's trust. Not only that, but it then makes the constituents wonder if the politician has lied

about other things, making them less likely to trust the politician. Weiner would suffer this problem during his mayoral campaign when his second sexting campaign came to light.

When Weiner first entered the NYC mayoral campaign, hoping to become the Democratic candidate, he spoke of being a “changed man¹” and his desire for New York to give him a second chance after his sexting scandal that led to his resignation in the House of Representatives. While originally, many seemed willing to give him that chance, that changed the moment he was forced to admit that he had actually continued engaging in the exchanging of explicit texts with other women after his resignation. One article in *The New York Times* suggests it persisted up until Weiner’s son was born.² According to multiple sources, Weiner had been engaged in sexually explicit texting, including more pictures of his penis, with a 22 year old woman in spite of the fact that he been in therapy to help overcome his apparent sexual addiction and had attempted to patch up his marriage. Had this been the first time that Weiner had lied, even then, he might have had a chance at redemption, but unfortunately for him, it was one of many lies he had told.

Back in 2011, when the original sexting scandal broke, Weiner was actually already considered to be a hot contender for mayor of New York City in the 2013 race. However, that changed when on May 27th of that year, a picture of a man’s crotch with an apparent erection appeared on Weiner’s Twitter account. It was Weiner’s own erection. He had intended to send it to a female fan of his, but by accident had actually posted it to his Twitter page where it was seen by all of his followers. He immediately then lied about it, claiming it to have been a prank by hackers. It was soon revealed, though, that Weiner had in fact lied and the picture was of his own

¹ David W. Chen and Javier C. Hernandez. "Weiner Admits Explicit Texting After House Exit." *New York Times*, July 23, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/24/nyregion/allegations-surface-of-explicit-exchanges-by-weiner-after-his-resignation.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

² Ibid.

penis. In Weiner's own words, the main reason he wanted to keep the story from breaking was to keep his wife Huma Abedin from learning the truth: "Huma was coming back from overseas, and I called her and left her a message. . . . I lied to her. The lies to everyone else were primarily because I wanted to keep it from her."³ However, Weiner eventually came clean to his wife as the investigations went on and women came forward, claiming the congressman had engaged in lewd messaging with them. Abedin was the one who convinced him to forward, saying, "[He has] just got to tell everyone the truth. Telling [her] doesn't help any⁴." Not long after this conversation, Weiner went public, admitting he lied about the pictures. He then officially resigned from the House of Representatives in disgrace.

The reason honesty was such a problem for Weiner in his campaign to become mayor of New York City was due to the fact that he had such a history of dishonesty. If he had only had the first scandal, there seems to have been a relatively good chance he could have won. In fact, according to a poll from *The Huffington Post*, it showed Weiner leading in the Democratic primary with 26% of the vote prior to the revelation of his second sex scandal.⁵ The fact that he had multiple instances having been caught lying and not telling the whole truth, however, destroyed any opportunity of him having a second chance in politics as it destroyed the public's trust in him. Clearly, many New Yorkers find it hard to trust a man who would not only lie to the public repeatedly, but would also lie to his own wife. The value of honesty in the Weiner case can be seen in the words of Barney Frank, a former congressman. In an article in *The New York Times*, Frank discusses how he suffered a sex scandal of his own. Frank feels that the reason he

³ Jonathan Van Meter. "Anthony Weiner and Huma Abedin's Post-Scandal Playbook." *New York Times*, April 10, 2013. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/14/magazine/anthony-weiner-and-huma-abedins-post-scandal-playbook.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Pollster. "POLLSTER UPDATE: Anthony Weiner Leads In Pre-Scandal Poll." *Huffington Post*, July 24, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/24/anthony-weiner-poll_n_3647899.html.

was able to recover from his scandal and get reelected was due to the fact that he immediately came clean about it.⁶ To add to this, in an interview with *The Daily Beast*, Marion Barry discussed the value of humility in recovery from political scandal and the value of genuinely trying to fix a mistake. In his own words, "I have respect if they are truly contrite, if they're truly sorry about what they did, if they're humble about it, that the political 'game' is not a game, that it's an honest comeback from hell into another kind of situation."⁷ Given that Weiner repeated the action that forced his resignation from Congress, it would seem that then his claims of being a "changed man" were insincere.

If anyone would know the value of honesty in surviving political scandal, it is Marion Barry. In spite of several political scandals in his long tenure in politics, he always managed to recover and win reelection. This is in no small part due to his honesty after each one came to light. He did not try to hide the truth and was willing to admit what happened. This streak of honesty would help him maintain the people's support to remain in office many times over.

Earlier in the year, Marion Barry got involved in a scandal relating to two land development companies. According to reports, Barry received gifts from the two, totaling \$6800.⁸ Along with that, he had partaken in a vote relating to one of the companies, Forney Enterprises, without disclosing the fact that he had accepted the gifts. The gift was disclosed on Barry's financial records, however. Nonetheless, by participating in the vote without revealing the gift, Barry violated city council ethics regulations and their Board of Ethics began an investigation.

⁶ Van Meter, op.cit.

⁷ Grove Lloyd. "Marion Barry, Comeback King, on Spitzer, Weiner, and Being Truly 'Humble'." *The Daily Beast*, July 15, 2013. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/07/15/marion-barry-comeback-king-on-spitzer-weiner-being-truly-humble.html>.

⁸ Mike DeBonis. "Barry may face censure, committee demotion after disclosing payments from contractors." *The Washington Post*, September 15, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/barry-could-face-censure-loss-of-committee-after-disclosing-payments-from-contractors/2013/09/15/2a04fd84-1ca3-11e3-82ef-a059e54c49d0_story.html.

Quickly, they and Barry came to a settlement, Barry agreeing to accept a censure and to pay a fine of \$13,600 as well as giving up his chairmanship of the Committee on Workforce and Community Affairs.⁹ Barry felt that this settlement was “fair.”¹⁰ However, while he did fail to disclose the information to the council before the vote, he did at least release the information on his financial records. In his own words, he said, “No one had to look under a rock for it, I disclosed it.”¹¹ Even one of the Board of Ethics members Jack Evans said that during the hearing that Barry seemed to recognize that he had done something wrong in this case.

Barry has shown a history of honesty when it comes to having been caught in scandal in the past. Back in 2009, Barry got into an ethics and legal issue on the city council after he was apparently stalking an ex-girlfriend due to an issue regarding a contract he gave to her. When he was first arrested for stalking Donna Watts-Brighthaupt, he was described by the US Park Police as being “very cooperative” when arrested.¹² While he managed to get the criminal stalking charges dropped, he still faced ethics violations from the city council when it was revealed he failed to disclose the contract to the council. According to *The Washington Post*, the contract he gave Watts-Brighthaupt channeled city money into nonprofit organizations he controlled. However, Barry argued against the charge, saying that the council had no official ruling or standard on personal service contracts, claiming that he could not be “violating something that

⁹ Aaron C. Davis and Mike DeBonis. “D.C. Council censures Marion Barry for taking cash payments from city contractors.” *The Washington Post*, September 17, 2013. http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-politics/dc-council-censures-marion-barry-for-taking-cash-payments-from-city-contractors/2013/09/17/02f22d06-1fba-11e3-b7d1-7153ad47b549_story.html.

¹⁰ Ben Nuckols. “Marion Barry Fined And Censured By D.C.'s Ethics Board Over Gifts From Contractors.” *The Huffington Post*, July 11, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/12/marion-barryethics_n_3585595.html.

¹¹ DeBonis, op.cit.

¹² Tim Craig and Jenna Johnson. “The Charge Against Barry: Stalking His Ex-Girlfriend.” *The Washington Post*, July 6, 2009. http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2009-07-06/news/36827342_1_anacostia-park-marion-barry-donna-watts-brighthaupt.

didn't exist in the first place.”¹³ Regardless, in both the stalking charge and the ethics charge, Barry did not lie about either. He argued the charges, certainly, and tried to fight the charges, but he never lied about either situation and was merely censured. Even then, he remained popular. In fact, while his censure in that situation lost Barry a chairmanship of one of the council's committees, he regained the chairmanship within a year's time.¹⁴

Both Weiner and Barry demonstrate the value of honesty in their political recovery, Weiner showing how a lack of it can destroy one's career while Barry shows how having it can save one's career and lessen the fallout. When running for mayor of New York City, Weiner had already dealing with a history of dishonesty from lying about his first sexting scandal back in 2011. That already put him at a disadvantage. Then, when his second sexting scandal was revealed, informing the world his sexual misconduct had continued after his resignation from the House of Representatives, in spite of his claims of being a “changed man,” his credibility was completely shot. The public could no longer trust his word and he lost the Democratic mayoral primary. Barry, on the other hand, had proven himself an honest man. In both the case of the contract he gave to Watts-Brighthaupt and the payment from Forney Enterprises, he did not lie or try to hide the cases, including in the case of the later, having disclosed the payment on financial forms. He did argue against the problems caused by them, though, but regardless was honest about their occurrences. Due to this, he was able to recover with relatively slap-on-the-wrist punishments with almost no damage to his popularity. In this respect, Barry clearly succeeded in recovery where Weiner failed. This, though, is not the only factor in which Barry would succeed while Weiner would fail in recovering from political scandal.

¹³ American Scene. “Ex-mayor violated laws.” The Washington Post, Editor's Picks, February 17, 2010. <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/feb/17/american-scene-94738815/>

¹⁴ DeBonis, op.cit.

Political Record

A strong political record is important for any politician seeking reelection. In order to win the vote of the people, a politician needs to show there is reason for their constituents to send them back to the board of education, D.C., the state capitol, etc. One of the best ways to demonstrate this is through their accomplishments in government. A politician's political record shows how well they did their job and what things they did during that time. It is a way of holding a politician accountable. The value of a political record is even more valuable to one who has suffered a political scandal. A strong list of accomplishments could be the difference between reelection and defeat. While a strong list could make the people think a politician deserves a second chance, a weak record would only add to the politician's defeat. Such was the case with Weiner and Barry. While Barry's strong and extensive record of political accomplishments helped survive multiple scandals, Weiner's nearly nonexistent record gave him no help whatsoever and actually hurt his credibility even more.

There is an old saying that the weakest dogs bark the loudest, and Anthony Weiner had what many in Congress would consider to be one of the loudest and most annoying of all. To quote Steve King of "Death and Taxes," he described Weiner as a "selfish, shameless, dishonest, manipulative, abrasive, demanding, serial [explicative]-photographing diva who somehow managed to prance his way into the House."¹⁵ The common theme that he and other writers present in their articles was that Weiner was more of a for-show politician, trying to create the appearance of a political record instead of actually creating one in order to position himself as a candidate for an eventual run as mayor of New York City. His tactics primarily focused on trying to make public events and big name events focus on him while in Congress, he would make big

¹⁵ Steve King. "Weiner, Booker, and the politics of self-promotion." Death and Taxes, August 22, 2013. <http://www.deathandtaxesmag.com/204285/weiner-booker-and-the-politics-of-self-promotion/>

scenes on the floor, ranting about issues and blaming the Republicans, but never really suggesting any ways to solve them. The only major piece of legislation he would sponsor and get passed was one for a major campaign donor. Ironically, Marion Barry, calling Weiner a “good Democrat” in an article in *The Hill*, had insisted during Weiner’s run for mayor that he get off the subject of his scandals and talk about his political record.¹⁶ Unfortunately for Weiner, he had none as pointed out by his political opponent Christine Quinn, who said, snidely comparing her record with Weiner’s, “And quite frankly, it’s bigger than anyone else’s who’s running for mayor.”¹⁷

There was one bill that Weiner was really adamant about passing in Congress, “and it was a bill that was clearly at the request of a campaign donor.”¹⁸ The bill in question was an anti-cigarette smuggling law. It was aimed at helping a very prominent campaign donor for the Weiner campaign by the name of Leonard Schwartz, an old law school friend of Weiner’s father. Due to the fact that Schwartz was losing a fair amount of money in cigarette sales due to smuggling, Weiner began a long fight in Congress to get legislation passed to help him out, even saying how the money from those smuggling runs were being used to support terrorist groups like Hezbollah.¹⁹ He proposed one bill to try and fix the problem in 2004, but failed to line up sponsors for the bill, causing it to die in committee. However, he did manage to get one passed four years later in 2008. In total, this action earned Weiner \$31,000 from Schwartz for his

¹⁶ Meghashyam Mali. “Marion Barry: Weiner a 'good Democrat.'” *The Hill*. July 28, 2013.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/blog-briefing-room/news/313935-marion-barry-weiner-a-good-democrat>

¹⁷ Adam Edelman. “NYC mayor hopeful Quinn rips Weiner's Congress record, questions ‘2nd chance’.” *The Daily News*, July 9, 2013. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/election/mayoral-hopeful-christine-quinn-rips-anthony-weiner-record-congress-questions-deserves-chance-article-1.1394166>

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ David M. Halbfinger. “Weiner’s Record in House: Intensity, Publicity and Limited Results.” *The New York Times*, June 12, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/13/nyregion/weiners-record-in-house-intensity-publicity-and-limited-results.html?_r=2&

planned 2009 mayoral run.²⁰ This was Weiner's only real act legislation and the only bill he introduced himself.

Other than that bill for Schwartz, Weiner never really did anything other than seek attention. In the words of former Rep. Zachary T. Space, he described Weiner like "he had a megaphone surgically attached to his mouth," constantly seeking to put emphasis on himself and build name recognition.²¹ Steve King described him as "seeking every microphone and camera from Washington to New York."²² Everything he did was for his personal benefit with his ultimate goal being to make it to City Hall in New York as mayor by trying to increase his fame. Another example of Weiner's "me-me-me" style would come in 2008 during an immigration forum he and three other representatives from New York City were supposed to attend to discuss then-President George W. Bush's failed immigration reform along with several other attendees. However, Weiner wanted the organizers to change the format, changing it from a collaborative styled forum to something more akin to a Congressional hearing. Naturally, Weiner wanted to make himself the chairman of this event, having the opportunity to hold the gavel and ask questions to the speakers for the event. When this plan was denied, Weiner refused to attend. As Dick Dadey of Citizens Union said, "It was disappointing... That format change would have shined the spotlight on him more than on the collaborative nature of the conversation."²³ In another situation in 2010, when power lines fell in Middle Village in Queens, Weiner hosted a press conference, but proposed no ways of fixing the damage or definitive ways to federal funding to aid in the repairs. Bob Holden of the Juniper Park Civic Association said in response

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² King, op.cit.

²³ Halbfinger, op.cit.

to this, "Actually doing the work was not necessary."²⁴ That statement effectively summed up the majority of Weiner's political career.

Adding onto his poor political record and building on his self-centered political thinking, Weiner was also said to have been a poor team player in Congress, alienating himself from his fellow representatives with an abrasive personality and even mistreating members of his own staff in fits of rage and impatience. In fact, according to an article by David Chen in 2008, Weiner had the highest staff turnover rate of the New York House delegation since 2001.²⁵ Two specific examples include him throwing a salad against a wall after one meltdown and another where he threw his Blackberry at the wall after a fight with a staffer and then blamed the staffer for it breaking.²⁶ As for his fellow Congressmen, he was well known for taking many potshots at them, particularly the Republicans. In February 2010, he accused the Republicans of all being wholly-owned subsidiaries of the insurance companies.²⁷ Many people began to wonder how he would be with overseeing the many civil servants of New York City seeing how he behaved with other politicians and his own staff.

If anything can be said for Weiner's record, it is that his was extremely, extremely lacking. It lacked any real substance, being nothing more really than innuendo and seemingly good intentions. This really helped to kill him in the mayoral election. On the other hand, Marion Barry, the one who recommended Weiner talk about his record, actually has a remarkably strong political record to help him. Without a doubt, his long list of accomplishments helped to save him from his several scandals.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ David Chen. "Congressman Pushes Staff Hard, Or Out the Door." The New York Times, July 23, 2008. http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/23/nyregion/23weiner.html?pagewanted=2&_r=0http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/23/nyregion/23weiner.html?pagewanted=2&_r=0

²⁶ Halbfinger, op.cit.

²⁷ Jillian Rayfield. "The Most Outraged Dem: Anthony Weiner's Greatest Hits." TalkingPointsMemo.com, August 4, 2010. <http://talkingpointsmemo.com/dc/the-most-outraged-dem-anthony-weiner-s-greatest-hits-video>

Marion Barry had been involved in formal politics since the early 1970s, but was a political activist from an even earlier time beginning in the 1960s. Beginning in that time, he was known to be an active member of the civil rights movement, marching with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and participating in many civil rights protests. In particular, he was one of the founding members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, being voted its president and then in 1965, he was the leading organizer of several protests aimed bus fare hikes he felt were aimed specifically at African-Americans.²⁸ Later, in 1968, he became a member of Washington, D.C.'s Economic Development Committee to help provide for African-Americans in the city.²⁹ These acts of activism and progressivism immediately helped to build for Barry a record of political activism and a desire to help the underprivileged of D.C. Beginning in the next decade, his record would strengthen as he entered public office.

After being first elected to the board of education in 1971, Barry proved himself a skilled politician and administrator after managing to balance the school budget.³⁰ When he was first elected to the city council in 1974, he became the chair of the District of Columbia Committee.³¹ However, he was most famous for his four terms as mayor of D.C., beginning in 1982. During his time as mayor, he helped solve many of D.C.'s economic issues, helping the city to improve.³² When he returned to the city council, he immediately went back to becoming a successful legislator. In January of this year, he introduced a law that would provide a tax break for live organ donors. Barry himself was in need of a new kidney and received a transplant back

²⁸ "Marion Barry." The Famous People. <http://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/marion-barry-4963.php>

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

in 2009.³³ This bill not only helped to strengthen his already strong political record, but also showed his concern for his constituents by trying to help live organ donors as one once helped him.

Weiner and Barry both demonstrate how crucial one's political record is to their survival after the breaking of a political scandal. Weiner had an extremely weak record. In spite of his desire to move the conversation away from his second sexting scandal and towards his record, he had no record to show. All he had to show for his time in politics was a lot of angry ranting and pretending to do something for the cameras. Not to mention, he demonstrated a great deal of trouble of working with others, and not just his opponents, but his own staff and fellow party members, a key trait for a successful politician. Barry, on the other hand, had an extensive political record of great successes and accomplishments. He proved himself a man of action immediately from his work in advocating civil rights back in the 1960s. He continued to empower his record throughout his time as a city councilman and mayor of D.C., helping to balance their budget and proposing legislation such as tax breaks for organ donors. These great accomplishments no doubt helped save Barry after his political scandals.

Connection to Constituents

For any politician, one of the most critical factors in winning reelection is how well they connect to their constituents. As they are the ones who vote politicians into office, the people must trust that person and feel they are deserving of a return to office. This is even more critical for a candidate recovering from political scandal. Very often, the trust the constituents place in a scandalized candidate and their willingness to give them a second chance depends on the connection the constituents built with them in the past. Just like with the other two, Anthony

³³ Chelsea Kiene. "Marion Barry Proposes D.C. Tax Break For Organ Donors." The Huffington Post, January 10, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/01/09/marion-barry-organ-donors_n_2442828.html

Weiner utterly failed in this section while Marion Barry managed to make a lasting connection with his constituents that saved him through his many scandals. In particular, there seemed to be one group of constituents that determined the election for both men. For Weiner, it was the female vote and for Barry, it was the black vote.

Weiner really struggled to connect with female constituents after his second sexting scandal broke. According to a joint *New York Times*-Siena College poll taken during the time of the mayoral primary right before the second scandal, while 66% of the men interviewed were willing to give Weiner a second chance, only 50% of women were willing to give him another shot.³⁴ Later, after the scandal came to light, Weiner was listed on a website known as SeekingArrangement.com, a dating website specifically for women seeking men they considered to be potential “sugar daddies.” Weiner scored a 78% approval rating on the site.³⁵ This no doubt damaged his relationship with his female constituents as it made him appear to be a playboy who failed to respect women, especially when added to the fact that he cheated on his wife multiple times. He also seemed out of touch with the people of New York in general, especially after this. In one poll from the *NY Daily News*, Weiner held only a 10% favorable rating, the lowest he ever fell.³⁶ And according to *Politico*, he had an overall 80% unfavorable rating, with the majority of New Yorkers finding the coverage of his campaign rather embarrassing.³⁷

Most of the time, Weiner was too busy answering questions about his scandal to really try and make a connection to the voters. Rather than talking about what he wanted to do, he was

³⁴ Chen, op.cit.

³⁵ Sanna Chu. “Anthony Weiner Approval Is At 78 Percent With Young Women On Sugar Daddy Dating Website.” *International Digital Times*, July 30, 2013. <http://www.idigitaltimes.com/articles/19148/20130730/anthony-weiner-approval-young-women-sugar-daddy.htm>

³⁶ Erin Durkin. “Anthony Weiner slips to lowest rating ever in poll of Democratic voters.” *NY Daily News*, August 8, 2013. <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/election/anthony-weiner-falls-lowest-poll-rating-article-1.1422016>

³⁷ Hadas Gold. “Poll: Anthony Weiner Breaks a Record.” *Politico*, August 12, 2013. <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/08/anthony-weiner-eliot-spitzer-favorability-poll-95433.html>

busy asking for another chance, making him seem desperate and even more unappealing. Marion Barry, on the other hand, in spite of his many scandals, managed to easily connect with his constituents, helping him to win constant reelections amid many scandals.

There are two phrases that sum up Marion Barry's time in politics. One is "To understand the District of Columbia, one must understand Marion Barry."³⁸ The other is the campaign slogan of his reelection campaign for his third term as mayor DC: "He May Not be Perfect, but He's Perfect for DC."³⁹ After nearly half a century in politics, Barry has become a staple of Washington politics, his name almost being synonymous with it. However, in spite of his many scandals, he remains one of the district's most popular politicians, having an overall approval rating of 52%.⁴⁰ Of particular note, though is the approval rating he has based on the racial divide. Among blacks, he possesses an 81% approval rating while he has only a 7% approval rating among whites.⁴¹ While this might seem polarizing, given the racial breakdown of the District of Columbia, it is not as polarized as it might seem. According to the 2010 Washington, DC census, whites make up only 38.5% of DC's citizens while blacks make up more than half the population with 50.7%.⁴²

Part of Barry's great connection to his constituents is due to his connection with the black community of Washington. Given how Ward 8 is predominantly black, his civil rights work in the 1960s and during his time in office made his constituents feel he was genuinely trying to help them and make their lives better. His 2008 campaign manager, Sandy Allen, said that his

³⁸ "Marion Barry Explains Why Having No Job Is Better Than Having One at Walmart." Moonbattery.com, July 28, 2013. <http://moonbattery.com/?p=33943>

³⁹ "Marion Barry: An Experienced Public Servant and Legislator." MarionBarryJr.com. <http://marionbarryjr.com/career-of-results/>

⁴⁰ "Poll: Marion Barry Is D.C.'s Highest-Rated Politician." The Huffington Post, July 24, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/07/24/poll-marion-barry-rating_n_1699166.html

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Rachel Cooper. "Census Information for Washington, DC, Suburban Maryland and Northern Virginia." About.com, 2013. <http://dc.about.com/od/communities/a/CensusDC2000.htm>

constituents “feel that he is one of them. ... He has not gotten so far above them that he does not understand their plight.”⁴³ Aside from that, Barry himself has said that the black community is “more forgiving” than other communities.⁴⁴ Of course, the reason the black community is so forgiving towards him is no doubt due to their belief that he is one of them. However, Barry’s connection to his constituents goes beyond merely the people in Ward 8 or even just the black community. He has a strong connection to the overall population of Washington, having been called by many of the citizens their honorary “Mayor for Life.”⁴⁵ Using his Twitter account, he establishes for himself a strong love of Washington, DC. He praised the good things about Washington to the city’s detractors in one tweet. In another, he congratulated one of the city’s high school’s graduating class for 2013. He has also made tweets about how great DC’s fireworks are and some of the greatest sports symbols, such as the Washington Redskins.⁴⁶ These tweets might seem small, but these actions just build his connection to DC, making almost everyone in the city feel like he is one of them.

Both Weiner and Barry show the value of making a connection to one’s constituents in regards to overcoming a political scandal. In the case of Weiner, he failed to make a connection to the people of New York, failing to make them feel like he was really one of them and looking out for the interests, leading him to the lowest approval ratings ever recorded for a Democrat in New York. Also, his high rating on SeekingArrangement.com helped destroy his credibility with women, making him seem like nothing more than a playboy and pervert. Barry, on the other hand, built an extremely powerful connection with his constituents. His long history of civil

⁴³ Ben Nuckols. “Marion Barry Gears Up For Another Campaign: ‘They Can’t Touch Me Politically.’” The Huffington Post, January 5, 2012. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/01/05/marion-barry-election-dc-council_n_1185648.html

⁴⁴ Grove, op.cit

⁴⁵ Nuckols, op.cit

⁴⁶ Brandon Wetherbee. “Marion Barry’s Showing His Love For D.C. On Twitter.” The Huffington Post, June 14, 2013. http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/14/marion-barry-twitter_n_3441944.html

rights work and DC's strong black population helped him seem like one of their own as he tried to make things better for them. He also appealed to the majority of DC by constantly using his Twitter account to show his pride for the city. His connection to the people made his constituents willing to give him the benefit of the doubt time and time again with all his scandals.

Type of Scandal

Perhaps the most obvious factor that determines whether or not a candidate can recover from political scandal is the scandal itself. People find different things to be more offensive than others, therefore, they may have differing opinions on how bad a particular type of scandal is. Clearly, people found Weiner's sexting scandal far more offensive than the many scandals that Barry was engulfed in. Many of Barry's scandals were minor oversights or merely poor judgment. Weiner's sex scandal, though, involved breaking a promise to his wife and was a repeated action.

"It turns out sexual misconduct is a fast track to a concession speech" were the words of Sonia Ossorio, the head of the NYC branch of the National Organization of Women (NOW).⁴⁷ That was her opinion after it was revealed that not only Anthony Weiner, but the other three men who were running for public office who had sex scandals in New York City were defeated in their campaigns. He, Eliot Spitzer, Vito J. Lopez, and Micah Z. Kellner all had sex scandals on their records and lost. Part of the reason that sex scandals in particular seem to be a surefire way to lose an election is no doubt due to increased role women play in voting and politics. Ossorio even said herself, "Voters will reject candidates who fail to treat women with respect and dignity."⁴⁸ What makes it even worse in the case of Weiner and Spitzer were that both men were

⁴⁷ Michael M. Grynbaum. "Forgive? No, a Night to Forget for Scandal-Tarred Candidates." The New York Times, September 11, 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/12/nyregion/forgive-no-a-night-to-forget-for-scandal-tarred-candidates.html?hpw&_r=0

⁴⁸ Ibid.

also cheating on their wives, breaking the vows they made in their weddings. This of course raises a point that one woman made in regards to Spitzer: “not even his wife can trust him.”⁴⁹ That is what made Weiner’s sex scandal so bad: his apparent lack of respect for women, half of the voting base, and his inability to be trusted by even his own wife.

However, Weiner’s scandal was also another type of scandal: it was a repeat affair. Not only did he engage in this activity once, but multiple times with a few different women. This very much changes the dynamic of his actions. People might be willing to forgive a one-time mistake, but continuous repetition of the action makes people less likely to believe it was a onetime action and see it as a real issue. For as Marion Barry said when commenting on Weiner and Spitzer’s reelection campaigns, “I have respect if they are truly contrite, if they’re truly sorry about what they did, if they’re humble about it, that the political ‘game’ is not a game, that it’s an honest comeback from hell into another kind of situation.”⁵⁰ What that means is people need to see that the candidate is really trying to fix the problem. Given how Weiner had to deal with multiple occasions of the same problem, the scandal became a repeat affair, causing people to believe that if Weiner were elected, this issue could occur again and again.

While Weiner’s scandals were extremely destructive to his political career, Marion Barry’s scandals have been nowhere near as detrimental. For one reason, many of his scandals were due to such things as minor oversights or misunderstandings. In the cases of his larger scandals, though, he accepted his punishment and did not commit the offense again, seeming to have learned his lesson. This is the case with his 1990 crack-cocaine bust where he was caught smoking the drug with his girlfriend at the time in a FBI sting operation.⁵¹ However, after doing his six months in prison for the crime, he returned to public life and never again used the drug.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Grove, op.cit.

⁵¹ Nuckols, op.cit.

Barry proved he had learned from his mistake and had gone to efforts to fix it, unlike Weiner. The other example, his dealing with Forney Enterprises back in September 2013, was an example of the other major type of scandal suffered by Barry: the administrative oversight. In this instance, Barry was censured by the city council for taking part in a vote relating to a contract with Forney Enterprises after failing to disclose his receipt of \$6,800 from the company.⁵² Barry, however, as mentioned prior in the “Honesty About Scandal” section, did disclose the gift on his financial records, at least. Though he did face a censure for it, Barry’s political strength suffered no real damage given how minor the scandal seemed. It was all due to a minor oversight on his part, failing to disclose the gift directly to the city council in spite of disclosing it indirectly via his proof of finances.

The actual kind of scandal a candidate has can play a decisive factor in their ability to win reelection. The type of scandal can determine how much trust the constituents can give to the candidate based upon the severity of the scandal. Weiner proved himself untrustworthy and undeserving of a second chance. His sexting scandal revealed his cheating on his wife, making people wonder if they could trust him when his own wife could not and the fact that he repeated the action several times made it seem he would continue to repeat the action while in office. Barry, on the other hand, showed that despite his numerous scandals, given the lesser severity of them, he could be trusted with multiple second chances. He accepted his punishment in regards to his drug bust and never committed the crime again, proving he had changed and learned his lesson. His later scandal regarding his gift from Forney Enterprises was found primarily to have been caused by an administrative oversight, nothing more than tiny error. These things made his scandals seem far less severe than Weiner’s. These examples show through Weiner and Barry how these four factors determine a candidate’s ability to get reelected after political scandal.

⁵² DeBonis, op.cit.

Analysis: So What?

Both Weiner and Barry are good examples of how differently a reelection bid can go for a scandalized political candidate based on these factors, but the question then becomes: why them? Why use them to examine how these factors affect a scandalized political candidate in their reelection bids? The simple answer to that is simply due to how high profile these two men are as far as scandalized politicians go. Both had scandals that received national attention. However, this then leads to more questions. Firstly, both men were well known Democrats in highly Democratic areas. Why then was it that one man was so highly scrutinized in one area while the other man continues to be strong in the other area? Why is it that the Democrats in New York City were less approving of Weiner while the Democrats of Washington, D.C. were so supportive of Barry? There are several reasons for these questions. Many of them go back to the factors spoken of prior relating to a candidate's likelihood to survive reelection after scandal. Barry had been a part of DC politics for years, starting as a civil rights activist and working his way up to becoming mayor for four terms and having been a city councilman for four terms as well and had gotten the job done. Weiner, on the other hand, had lied continuously and had no real political record to show for his time in politics. However, the media plays a particularly powerful role in how a scandal is portrayed. This is the reason why Weiner and Barry were seen so differently in these areas: it was not so much because of a difference in the opinions of Democrats in New York City compared to Washington, D.C., but due to different media portrayals.

The media has been a way to keep politicians honest by bringing scandals to light. No doubt the most obvious example of this is the breaking of the Watergate scandal in the 1970s when "Deep Throat" gave Woodward and Bernstein his insider information. This trend has

continued into the modern day, but has evolved beyond simply reporting these scandals. Today, they have the ability to spin the scandal in a particular way, and the way they spin the scandal can depend upon how well the candidate plays with the media. If the candidate makes the camera their friend, the media might help them, but if they do not play ball, then the news agencies and bloggers can hang the candidate out to dry. Without a doubt, the media role's in determining the outcome of political scandals will continue to increase in the coming years. Its differing treatment of Barry and Weiner make that extremely apparent. In his interview with Marion Barry about Anthony Weiner and Eliot Spitzer's runs for office in New York City, Lloyd Grove commented how "for all his self-acknowledged flaws, is enormously charming and likable—qualities [he has] appreciated since [he] was a reporter at *The Washington Post* during his mayoralty and afterward."⁵³ In these and other situations with the media, Barry comes out as a media darling due to his natural charisma. He continuously plays to the media and embraces it, no doubt something that helped him through his scandals. In one situation he was even known to have used it to attack a political opponent by the name of Natalie Williams via a news release.⁵⁴ Also, Barry's posts on Twitter showing his love for Washington, D.C. mentioned earlier also show the increasing strength of the media in regards to political scandal. Moves like those demonstrated Barry's shrewd media savvy. He uses his Twitter to portray his more charming characteristics. This smart play to the media and shrewd use of the evolution of social media in regards to politics has helped him in his scandalized past.

Weiner, on the other hand, has had the exact opposite reception from the media. The media presented a far different portrayal of him to the people because he did not appeal to them or try to use them to help him. He often came off as confrontational, abrasive, and some points

⁵³ Grove, op.cit

⁵⁴ Nuckols, op.cit

just down right mean and nasty. During his first sexting scandal when he was in Congress, he first called one reporter a “jackass” during a press conference prior to admission that it was his penis in the picture on his Twitter.⁵⁵ He then continued changing the facts or ways he said things as the investigation went, causing reporters to believe more and more that Weiner was hiding something. The example that most shows how poorly Weiner responded to the media was after his defeat in the Democratic mayoral primary when he gave the finger to photographers as he left.⁵⁶ Had Weiner been more open and responsive to the media, he might have been able to use them to help save him his image in the cases of both scandals, regardless of having been on the negative sides of all the factors relating to recovery from scandal. That is why it is was the media’s treatment of the two that caused such a drastic difference in the views of Democrats in New York City: one worked with the media to try and emphasize his positive qualities while the other fought with it, leading to them only focusing on his negatives. The four factors identified as the main reasons why a candidate can win reelection can be portrayed as more or less important based on how the candidate gets the media to portray them.

Weiner’s scandal, in particular, demonstrates a unique change in not only the power of the media in political scandal, but also in the medium through which it is expressed. Weiner’s scandal was a sex scandal with no sex. It was done all via sexting. Weiner contacted multiple young women over text message, e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter, the latter of course having led to his original downfall when the picture of his erection wound up on his Twitter profile.⁵⁷ This fact raises a new question: was the Internet the reason Weiner’s sexting was such a scandal? Weiner himself certainly thought, having said, “Maybe if the Internet didn’t exist? Like, if I was

⁵⁵ Van Meter, op.cit

⁵⁶ Alexandra Petri. “So long, Weiner.” The Washington Post, September 11, 2013.
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/compost/wp/2013/09/11/so-long-weiner/>

⁵⁷ Van Meter, op.cit

running in 1955? I'd probably get elected mayor."⁵⁸ This certainly has a strong amount of truth to it. In the digital age, it is much harder to get rid of proof like the proof found in Weiner's case. With Facebook messaging and Twitters or even e-mails, all one needs to do is take a screen shot of a message or simply just not delete it and there is the blatant truth. Chris Cuomo of ABC had found a woman who Weiner had texted with.⁵⁹ While it was not stated in the article if she still had any of the texts, if she did, it would have provided clear proof of Weiner's illicit actions. The Internet also allowed Weiner's actions to be right in the people's faces. At the time of his first scandal, Weiner had 45,000 followers on Twitter.⁶⁰ The moment they went onto his Twitter page, the picture of his erection was right there before their eyes in plain sight. In an op-ed for *The Washington Post*, Alexandra Petri spoke about this in relation the sex scandal of Mark Sanford: "We got over Mark Sanford! But that was because Sanford didn't leave a trail of weird pictures."⁶¹ Weiner's sexting led to a new reality never before seen in a sex scandal: people could actually see the type of actions Weiner had committed. It was impossible to hide it. Anyone could easily have re-Tweeted the picture to their followers to allow them to see it, hence making it bigger than a normal sex scandal.

The media has an extremely strong role in relation to a candidate's survival after a scandal. Depending on how one interacts with them, it can totally change the spin on their scandal and how the candidate looks after it, regardless of the factors involved in the scandal. Barry's embrace of the media, welcoming them and using his natural charisma has helped him survive time and time again. Weiner's constant fighting with the media, however, turned them

⁵⁸ Alex Napoliello. "Anthony Weiner: I'd probably be elected mayor if Internet didn't exist." NJ.com, October 17, 2013.

http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2013/10/anthony_weiner_claims_he_would_by_mayor_if_not_for_the_inter_net.html

⁵⁹ Van Meter, op.cit

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Petri, op.cit

against him and made the media into his enemy. Weiner was also hurt by the way the Internet has changed the face of traditional media. The evolution of social media like Facebook and Twitter has made it much harder to hide one's actions. His sexually explicit text messages sent over these and other mediums allowed them to be saved and presented in the future as clear evidence of what someone has said. Also, because of Twitter, everyone could see the picture he posted of himself, making it seem worse as people could actually see what he did and then re-Tweet it to their followers, allowing the evidence to spread. What does all this say for future scandalized politicians? All of this shows that not only will the media continue to have a great deal of control over the spin of political scandals in the future, but also that as technology advances more, it will become even harder for political candidates to hide their scandals, thereby (hopefully) forcing politicians to be less likely to commit these actions as it will be far easier to get caught.

Conclusion

Anthony Weiner and Marion Barry are undoubtedly two of the nation's most notorious politicians, known best for their political scandals. One was caught in a set of disturbing sexting scandals that forced his resignation from the House of Representatives and lost him the Democratic primary for mayor of New York City as he tried to make a political comeback. The other was man who, despite having been caught smoking crack by the FBI and having been caught in multiple ethics violations, continues to be one of if not the most popular politician in Washington, D.C. That factors that most related to their individual success and failure at reelection came down the effects of four key factors: their honesty about the scandals, their political records, their connections to their constituents, and the scandals themselves.

For Anthony Weiner, he had all the factors working against him. He failed to be honest in both his sexting scandals. In the first, he lied multiple times that the picture on his Twitter was not of his own erection before he finally admitted the truth while in the second, he failed to reveal that he had continue his illicit sexting after his resignation from the House of Representatives. His political record was nonexistent. Most of the time, he was busy looking for time in front of the camera to make himself well-known while trying to make it look like he was doing something rather than actually doing real work. He only sponsored one bill that was aimed at helping a major campaign sponsor and spent the rest of his time blaming the Republican Party for everything and distancing himself from all other congressmen with his abrasive attitude. He lacked any real connection to his constituents. He received the lowest ever recorded approval rating for a Democrat in New York and on a dating website for women looking for “sugar daddies” scored a 78% hotness rating, killing his credibility with women. Lastly, his sex scandal alienated women due to the increased role of women in politics and voting. Also, because his actions were repeated multiple times, people believed that Weiner had not truly changed his ways and he would potentially continue this kind of behavior while mayor.

Marion Barry had all the factors working in his favor. He never lied about his scandals. When caught, he confessed. He did fight many of them, but he never lied or tried to cover them up. His political record was vast and impressive. He had been in politics for nearly half a century. He worked with Martin Luther King in the 1960s as a civil rights activist. While in politics, both as mayor and city councilmen, he helped improve conditions for African-Americans in the district and introduced many laws that were seen as progressive, such as tax breaks for organ donors. He had an incredibly strong connection to his constituents, having a 52% overall approval rating and an 81% approval rating among blacks who saw him as a

member of their community. He was constantly using his Twitter to demonstrate his love for Washington, D.C. Lastly, his scandals were mainly due to administrative oversights. After his biggest scandal, his cocaine bust back in 1990, he served his time in prison and never touched the drug again.

The examples these two men provide also demonstrate how the media has and will continue to play an increasingly powerful role in the outcomes of political scandal. The media can bring a political scandal to light, but it can also put its own spin on it based on how the politician responds to them. Barry was able to get his better qualities portrayed through the media as he embraced it and welcomed them with his charismatic personality. Weiner, however, had the media turn against him due to his abrasive attitude, constantly arguing with reporters and fighting against them. The media also made Weiner's case seem worse through the Internet and social media. The conversations he had with the many young women over e-mail, texting, Twitter, and Facebook were able to be saved and shown later. Then, because of Twitter, everyone could see the picture of himself, making it seem grosser and worse as they actually could see the evidence themselves.

Both Barry and Weiner are prime examples of how the above factors can affect a politician's attempt at reelection. Granted, both of them are at the extreme ends of the spectrum: Barry being one had everything going right for him while Weiner had every one of them working against him. In truth, just one of these factors could determine a candidate's success or failure at recovery, but all of them are important. Hopefully, the examples of these two men, plus the increasing power of the media in the digital age to bring scandals to light will make future politicians less likely to commit actions of those kinds.