

# THE FIELD POLL

THE INDEPENDENT AND NON-PARTISAN SURVEY  
OF PUBLIC OPINION ESTABLISHED IN 1947 AS  
THE CALIFORNIA POLL BY MERVIN FIELD

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**BY AN UNPRECEDENTED NINE TO ONE MARGIN, VOTERS DISAPPROVE OF CONGRESS' PERFORMANCE. DROP IN FEINSTEIN'S AND BOXER'S JOB RATINGS. MORE VOTERS NOW DISINCLINED THAN INCLINED TO RE-ELECT FEINSTEIN IN 2012.**

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By Mark DiCamillo and Mervin Field

A *Field Poll* survey completed earlier this week provides another black marker in the long-term decline in confidence that the public has in the U.S. Congress.

The proportion of California voters who disapprove of how Congress is doing its job stands at a record 86%, more than nine times the number (9%) who approve of that body. This represents the poorest appraisal of the Congress in the twenty years that *The Field Poll* has been tracking views of that legislative body.

California's two Democratic U.S. Senators, Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, have not escaped the dismal view that voters have of Washington's lawmakers. Their individual approval ratings are now at the lowest levels of their tenures.

Unlike the highly supportive expression of support that voters have given Feinstein in each of her previous re-election bids, more voters are now disinclined (44%) than inclined (41%) to support her should she seek re-election in 2012.

### **Congress' job performance**

The unfavorable view that voters have of the Congress has been climbing in a nearly uninterrupted manner over the past seven years. Californians' current view of that body is now at an all-time low, with just 9% approving of its performance and 86% disapproving.

While Congress has been down-rated frequently in the recent past, never before has there been a greater than nine to one negative appraisal as exists today.

Opinions do not vary much by party, as both Democratic and Republican voters are extremely disapproving of the job the Congress is doing.

<b>Table 1</b>			
<b>Trend of Californians' views of the job performance of the U.S. Congress                      (among registered voters)</b>			
	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>9%</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>5</b>
March 2011	17%	71	12
September 2010	19%	72	9
July 2010	19%	71	10
March 2010	12%	79	9
January 2010	24%	66	10
October 2009	23%	66	11
March 2009	34%	53	13
December 2007	20%	66	14
October 2007	22%	64	14
August 2007	20%	66	14
March 2007	35%	50	15
May 2006	23%	64	13
April 2006	24%	66	10
August 2004	33%	52	15
April 2003	50%	39	11
April 2002	48%	39	13
January 2002	54%	33	13
December 2001	57%	32	11
May 2001	51%	38	11
January 2001	53%	35	12
August 2000	54%	34	12
June 2000	40%	48	12
February 2000	42%	42	16
October 1999	30%	60	10
March 1999	37%	54	9
August 1998	57%	33	10
August 1997	38%	51	11
February 1997	36%	46	18
June 1996	38%	59	3
February 1996	25%	68	7
September 1995	36%	58	6
May 1995	44%	51	5
September 1994	33%	62	5
July 1992	24%	71	5
January 1992	32%	67	1
<b>Party (Sept. 2011)</b>			
Democrats	11%	83	6
Republicans	7%	91	2
Non-partisans/others	7%	84	9

*Note: For measures conducted prior to 1997, original surveys used a five-point response scale, which has been converted to a two-point approve/disapprove scale for comparative purposes. In addition, surveys conducted prior to 1997 were completed among a cross-section of all California adults, not just registered voters.*

**Ratings of partisans in Congress**

Both Congressional Democrats and Republicans are viewed negatively by this state's voters, although GOP representatives are viewed more unfavorably than Democratic members.

The job rating of the Democratic lawmakers stands at 30% approve and 59% disapprove, while ratings of Republican members are 19% approve and 70% disapprove.

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>30%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>11</b>
March 2011	32%	55	13
September 2010	35%	54	11
March 2007	47%	40	13
August 2004	32%	50	18
April 2003	40%	46	14
April 2002	46%	39	15
May 2001	51%	37	12
January 2001	57%	31	12
June 2000	46%	39	15
<b>Party (Sept. 2011)</b>			
Democrats	51%	40	9
Republicans	6%	88	6
Others/non-partisans	24%	58	18

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>11</b>
March 2011	22%	63	15
September 2010	22%	66	12
March 2007	19%	70	11
August 2004	32%	52	16
April 2003	46%	42	12
April 2002	42%	45	13
May 2001	42%	47	11
January 2001	49%	39	12
June 2000	32%	55	13
<b>Party (Sept. 2011)</b>			
Democrats	9%	85	6
Republicans	36%	50	14
Others/non-partisans	15%	68	17

**Opinions of Boxer’s performance**

After serving five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, Democratic Senator Barbara Boxer was elected to the U.S. Senate in 1992. She won re-election in 1998, 2004 and 2010.

Throughout her tenure, Boxer’s job ratings have typically been more positive than negative. However, last year for the first time more voters disapproved than approved of her performance. This continues today, with just 39% approving and 42% disapproving.

In the current survey Democratic voters view Boxer favorably 58% to 23%, but Republicans disapprove 72% to 11%. Non-partisans are divided, with 38% approving and 40% disapproving.

**Table 4**  
**Trend of Barbara Boxer’s job performance ratings as U.S. Senator**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<u>Approve</u>	<u>Disapprove</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>19</b>
March 2011	42%	40	18
September 2010	41%	43	16
July 2010	42%	43	15
January 2010	48%	38	14
October 2009	44%	37	19
May 2008	48%	31	21
2007 (Average)	45%	34	21
2006 (Average)	45%	34	21
2005 (Average)	46%	33	21
2004 (Average)	46%	35	19
2003 (Average)	46%	35	19
2002 (Average)	45%	29	26
2001 (Average)	49%	31	20
2000 (Average)	50%	30	20
1999 (Average)	45%	35	20
1998 (Average)	45%	29	26
1997 (Average)	41%	35	24
1996 (Average)	42%	36	22
1995 (Average)	45%	39	16
1994 (Average)	43%	37	20
1993 (Average)	41%	35	24
<u>Party (Sept. 2011)</u>			
Democrats	58%	23	19
Republicans	11%	72	17
Non-partisans/others	38%	40	22

*Note: For measures conducted prior to 1997, original surveys used a five-point response scale, which has been converted to a two-point approve/disapprove scale for comparative purposes. In addition, surveys prior to 1997 also were conducted among all California adults.*

**Opinions of Feinstein’s performance**

Along with Boxer, Democratic Senator Dianne Feinstein was also first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1992.

Feinstein has generally received favorable job performance appraisals from Californians, typically higher than those given Boxer. In nearly every poll conducted over the past two decades, more voters have approved than disapproved of Feinstein by double-digit margins.

But now voter perceptions of Feinstein’s performance are closely divided – 41% approving and 39% disapproving. This represents her lowest job approval ratings of her tenure.

Democratic voters approve of her performance by a 60% to 21% margin. However, Republicans are even more one-sided in their disapproval – 71% to 14%. Non-partisans give Feinstein a 40% approve and 32% disapprove rating.

**Table 5**  
**Trend of Dianne Feinstein’s job performance ratings as U.S. Senator**  
**(among California registered voters)**

	<b>Approve</b>	<b>Disapprove</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>20</b>
June 2011	46%	31	23
March 2011	48%	33	19
September 2010	46%	37	17
October 2009	46%	35	19
May 2008	48%	32	20
2007 (Average)	54%	30	16
2006 (Average)	51%	31	18
2005 (Average)	52%	27	21
2004 (Average)	54%	26	20
2003 (Average)	52%	32	16
2002 (Average)	49%	26	25
2001 (Average)	57%	27	16
2000 (Average)	57%	27	16
1999 (Average)	51%	28	21
1998 (Average)	56%	27	17
1997 (Average)	47%	35	18
1996 (Average)	46%	36	18
1995 (Average)	50%	40	10
1994 (Average)	47%	39	14
1993 (Average)	47%	32	21
<b>Party (Sept. 2011)</b>			
Democrats	60%	21	19
Republicans	14%	71	15
Non-partisans/others	40%	32	28

*Note: For measures conducted prior to 1997, original surveys used a five-point response scale, which has been converted to a two-point approve/disapprove scale for comparative purposes. In addition, surveys prior to 1997 also were conducted among all California adults.*

### **Inclination to re-elect Feinstein**

Feinstein's current term in office ends next year and so far she has not signified whether she will run again. However, should she decide to run, in contrast to each of her three previous re-election bids, there is less enthusiasm among voters to favor her candidacy this time around.

Last March the disposition of voters to re-elect Feinstein was 46% inclined and 42% not inclined. A June survey also found a four-point plurality in favor of her re-election (43% to 39%).

Now for the first time, the proportion of voters disinclined to have her serve another six years is larger than those inclined – 44% to 41%.

In each of Feinstein's three previous re-election bids, about one year ahead of the election, majorities of voters said they were inclined to keep her in the Senate for another term. For example, in August 2005, 52% of the state's voters said they wanted Feinstein to be re-elected and 38% were disinclined. In March 1999, 59% were inclined to re-elect her to another term and 37% were disinclined. In August 1993, *The Field Poll* found that by a 53% to 37% margin, voters were supportive of her candidacy.

**Table 6**  
**Voter inclination to re-elect Dianne Feinstein to the U.S. Senate**  
**(among registered voters)**

	<b>Inclined</b>	<b>Not inclined</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
<b>September 2011</b>	<b>41%</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>15</b>
June 2011	43%	39	18
March 2011	46%	42	12
<u>Party</u>			
Democrats	62%	21	17
Republicans	14%	75	11
Non-partisans/others	38%	45	17
<u>Area</u>			
Coastal California	46%	39	15
Inland California	31%	55	14
<u>Region</u>			
Los Angeles County	44%	38	18
Other Southern California	33%	53	14
Central Valley	29%	56	15
San Francisco Bay Area	61%	25	14
Other Northern California**	41%	43	16
<u>Gender</u>			
Male	40%	46	14
Female	43%	41	18
<u>Age</u>			
18 – 29	40%	37	23
30 – 39	45%	35	20
40 – 49	42%	47	11
50 – 64	40%	47	13
65 or older	41%	47	12
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>			
White non-Hispanic	39%	50	11
Latino	45%	34	21
African-American**	53%	13	34
Asian/other**	52%	31	17
<u>Previous re-election bids (1 yr. prior)</u>			
August 2005	52%	38	10
March 1999*	59%	37	4
August 1993	53%	37	10

\* Only generic measure taken in 1999.

\*\* Small sample base.

Note: All subgroup percentages are from the September 2011 Field Poll.

## **Information About The Survey**

### **Methodological Details**

The findings in this report are based on a *Field Poll* survey completed September 1-12, 2011 among a random sample of 1,001 registered voters in California. In order to cover a broad range of issues and minimize respondent fatigue, some of the questions in this release were asked of a random subsample of 481 voters.

Interviewing was conducted by telephone in English and Spanish using live interviewers working from Field Research Corporation's central location telephone interviewing facilities. Up to six attempts were made to reach, screen and interview each randomly selected voter on different days and times of day during the interviewing period.

Interviewing was completed on either a voter's landline phone or a cell phone depending on the source of the telephone listing from the voter file. After the completion of interviewing, the overall registered voter sample was weighted to *Field Poll* estimates of the characteristics of the registered voter population in California by region, age, gender and party registration.

Sampling error estimates applicable to the results of any probability-based survey depend on sample size as well as the percentage distribution being examined. The maximum sampling error estimates for results based on the overall registered voters sample is +/- 3.2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while findings based on voters included the random subsample have a maximum sampling error of +/- 4.6 percentage points. The maximum sampling error is based on results in the middle of the sampling distribution (i.e., percentages at or near 50%). Percentages at either end of the distribution (those closer to 10% or 90%) have a smaller margin of error.

There are other potential sources of error in surveys besides sampling error. However, the overall design and execution of the survey sought to minimize these other possible sources of error.

*The Field Poll* was established in 1947 as *The California Poll* by Mervin Field, who is still an active advisor. The *Poll* has operated continuously since then as an independent, non-partisan survey of California public opinion. The *Poll* receives annual funding from media subscribers of *The Field Poll*, from several California foundations, and the University of California and California State University systems, who receive the data files from each *Field Poll* survey shortly after its completion for teaching and secondary research purposes.

### **Questions Asked**

Overall, do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is doing its job?\*

What about the Democrats in Congress? Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congressional Democrats are doing their job?\*

What about the Republicans in Congress? Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congressional Republicans are doing their job?\*

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Barbara Boxer is handling her job as U.S. Senator?\*

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Dianne Feinstein is handling her job as U.S. Senator?\*

Dianne Feinstein's term in the U.S. Senate ends next year. If Feinstein runs for re-election, would you be inclined or not inclined to re-elect Feinstein to the U.S. Senate?

\* Asked of a random subsample of voters.