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***Two-thirds of Californians believe Feinstein no longer fit to serve in the Senate;
Plurality supports her resignation to allow Newsom to appoint a successor.
- March 2024 Senate primary election remains a wide-open affair -***

by Mark DiCamillo, Director, *Berkeley IGS Poll*

The latest statewide *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed this week asked California voters for their opinions about the state's senior U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein, who only last week returned to the Senate after an extended absence due to a health setback from complications related to shingles.

The Senator had previously announced that she would not seek re-election in 2024, but also said she intends to serve out the rest of her term through the end of next year. However, many Californians view the Senator's current health situation as increasingly problematic. Two-thirds of the registered voters polled (67%) agreed with the statement, "*Feinstein's latest illness underlines the fact that she is no longer fit to continue serving in the U.S. Senate.*" Agreement extends to voters of all political stripes.

Voters are less one-sided when asked what the best resolution would be for Feinstein. The largest proportion (42%) believes it would be best for Feinstein to resign from the Senate and allow Governor Gavin Newsom to appoint a successor, while 27% favor her continuing to serve and end her long Senate career on her own terms. But many voters (31%) are undecided or are choosing to withhold judgement.

Significantly, support for Feinstein's resignation and the appointment of a replacement by the Governor is greatest among fellow Democrats and liberals, who favor that outcome greater than two to one. By contrast, more Republicans and strong conservatives oppose than support her resignation ostensibly because it would enable Newsom to appoint her successor.

In addition, the poll finds Feinstein's overall standing with voters continuing to decline. Just 29% of the state's voters now view the Senator favorably, down 8 percentage points from February and nearly 20 points lower than when she ran for re-election in 2018.

The poll also asked likely voters in next year's March 2024 primary election their voting preferences for U.S. Senate, and the results indicate that the race remains a wide-open affair. Bunched closely together atop the field are the only major Republican to have entered the race, attorney Eric Early, with 18%, Democratic Congresswoman Katie Porter at 17% and Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff at 14%. Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee trails at 9%. But a huge 32% remain undecided in the race, while another 10% say they would support "someone else."

Although Democratic voters outnumber Republicans nearly two to one in California, Early's relatively strong standing in the poll is due to his being the top choice of large proportions of Republican and conservative voters, while the state's much larger pool of Democratic voters are dividing their support among the three major Democratic contenders.

IGS Co-Director G. Cristina Mora noted that "the poll clearly shows that while support for Senator Feinstein has waned considerably since 2018, there is no clear consensus about how the process should play out, and this will impact her ability to connect with voters and serve her constituents over the remainder of her term."

Reactions to statements about Senator Feinstein's current status in the U.S. Senate

Voters in the poll were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with seven statements about Senator Feinstein's current situation in the Senate.

Receiving the broadest agreement is the statement, "*Feinstein's latest illness underlines the fact that she is no longer fit to continue serving in the U.S. Senate.*" Statewide 67% agree, while 20% disagree. In addition, agreement is bipartisan and includes 63% of Democrats, 75% of Republicans and 66% of No Party Preference voters.

A 56% majority also agrees with the statement, "*Feinstein's health problems are creating serious problems for the Democratic Party's ability to get judicial nominees confirmed and get important legislation approved,*" while 20% disagree. Democrats are the most likely segment to concur, agreeing by a four-to-one margin.

Voters are of two minds when it comes to allowing Newsom to appoint a successor to fill the Senate seat should Feinstein resign. A 52% to 34% majority agrees that "*allowing Governor Newsom to appoint a successor to serve out the remainder of Feinstein's term would benefit the state because a successor could better represent California's interests in the Senate.*" But by a similar margin (56% to 34%) voters agree that "*allowing Governor Newsom to appoint someone to serve out the remainder of Feinstein's term is a bad thing because voters, not the Governor, should choose the state's senators.*"

Views about allowing Newsom to appoint a successor to Feinstein are highly partisan, with a large majority of Democrats agreeing that it would benefit the state, while Republicans disagree by a greater than three-to-one margin. In addition, GOP voters overwhelmingly concur with the view that voters, not the Governor, should be choosing our U.S. Senators.

Voters are divided when asked whether "*forcing Senator Feinstein out of office because of her current health problems would set a bad precedent for other officeholders who encounter problems with their health in the future,*" with 43% in agreement and 46% disagreeing.

By a 52% to 31% margin voters disagree with the view that "*seniority in the Senate matters a great deal and a Feinstein resignation would be a major loss for the state.*"

In addition, a 58% to 29% majority disagrees that "*the calls for Feinstein to resign following her absence are rooted in sexism and would not be happening if an aging male senator were facing similar problems.*" Men disagree overwhelmingly (70% to 20%). More women disagree as well, but by a narrower 47% to 38% margin.

Plurality favors Feinstein’s resignation as the best resolution to her situation, but many are unsure and withhold judgement

When asked what the best resolution would be for Feinstein’s current situation, 42% think it would be best for her to resign and allow Governor Newsom to appoint a successor, 27% say she should continue to serve and end her career on her own terms, while 31% are unsure.

Significantly, support for Feinstein’s resignation is greatest among rank-and-file Democrats and liberals. By contrast, Republicans and strong conservatives support her continuing to serve in the Senate rather than having her resign and allowing Newsom to appoint a successor.

Pluralities across most demographic subgroups favor a Feinstein resignation rather than having her serve out her term, although large proportions are undecided. Support for resignation prevails among slightly more men than women, but still includes a plurality of women.

Table 1
What would be the best resolution of Feinstein’s current situation in the U.S. Senate?
(among registered voters in California)

	Resign from office and allow Gov. Newsom to appoint a successor	Continue to serve, get well, and end her Senate career on her own terms	Not sure/ undecided
	%	%	%
Total registered voters	42	27	31
<u>Party registration</u>			
Democrats	52	24	24
Republicans	22	34	44
No party preference/others	42	26	32
<u>Political ideology</u>			
Strongly liberal	56	24	20
Somewhat liberal	52	21	27
Moderate	39	28	33
Somewhat conservative	32	29	39
Strongly conservative	21	34	45
<u>Age</u>			
18-29	36	25	39
30-39	38	25	37
40-49	47	24	29
50-64	40	30	30
65 or older	46	28	26
<u>Gender</u>			
Female	37	29	34
Male	46	25	29

Feinstein’s standing with voters continues to deteriorate

Feinstein’s illness is having a direct impact on her overall standing with the state’s electorate. The current poll finds nearly twice as many now viewing her unfavorably (52%) as favorably (29%). The Senator’s favorability scores are now eight percentage points lower than they were in February and represent a continuation of a longer-term decline since her re-election to the Senate in 2018. Most of her more recent declines are coming from fellow Democrats, just 43% of whom now view her favorably, down from 75% when she last ran for re-election.

Table 2
Trend of California voter image ratings of U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein 2018 – present
(among registered voters in California)

	Total registered voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Pref./others %
May 2023				
Favorable	29	43	8	22
Unfavorable	52	38	78	51
No opinion	19	19	14	27
February 2023				
Favorable	37	55	10	31
Unfavorable	43	24	77	45
No opinion	20	21	13	24
January 2021				
Favorable	38	56	10	33
Unfavorable	46	29	80	43
No opinion	16	15	10	24
October 2018*				
Favorable	48	75	11	44
Unfavorable	49	22	87	50
No opinion	3	3	2	6

* October 2018 poll conducted among likely voters in the November 2018 general election

No clear leader in the 2024 primary election for U.S. Senate

No clear leader has yet to emerge when voters are asked their voting preferences in next year’s March primary election to fill Feinstein’s Senate seat.

Clustered closely together atop the field are the only major Republican to have entered the race, attorney Eric Early, with 18%, Democratic Congresswoman Katie Porter at 17% and Democratic Congressman Adam Schiff at 14%. Democratic Congresswoman Barbara Lee trails at 9%. But the largest proportion (32%) are undecided at this stage, while another 10% they would choose “someone else.”

Early’s strong standing in the poll is due to his broad support from fellow Republican and conservative voters. He also polls well among voters in the Inland Empire, the Central Valley, and those living in rural areas of the state, which tend to include more Republicans.

In addition to receiving support from fellow Democrats, Porter’s base of support comes primarily from liberal voters, those living in Orange County, her home district, and voters ages 30-49. Schiff also does well among Democrats and outpolls Porter among moderates and voters ages 65 or older. The most distinctive feature of voter support for Lee is her strength among the state’s Black voters, 32% of whom are currently backing her candidacy. Lee also polls well among strongly liberal voters and voters in the nine-county San Francisco Bay Area, her home region.

Table 3						
Preferences in the 2024 primary election for U.S. Senate overall and across major subgroups of the California registered voter population (among likely voters in the March primary election)						
	Early (R)	Porter (D)	Schiff (D)	Lee (D)	Someone else	Undecided
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Total likely voters	18	17	14	9	10	32
<u>Party registration</u>						
Democrats	2	27	22	15	2	32
Republicans	49	1	1	*	19	30
No party preference/others	14	14	13	6	16	37
<u>Political ideology</u>						
Strongly liberal	*	35	15	21	1	28
Somewhat liberal	*	28	25	11	3	33
Moderate	13	13	21	6	8	39
Somewhat conservative	37	3	2	5	22	31
Strongly conservative	56	3	1	1	21	18
<u>Age</u>						
18-29	14	17	9	12	6	42
30-39	17	21	9	7	7	39
40-49	18	23	9	10	10	30
50-64	22	16	13	10	10	29
65 or older	17	12	22	8	14	27
<u>Gender</u>						
Female	16	19	14	10	7	34
Male	21	15	14	8	13	29
<u>Race/ethnicity</u>						
White non-Hispanic	20	17	16	7	10	30
Latino	18	21	9	10	10	32
Asian/Pacific Islander	14	13	13	9	13	38
Black	5	13	14	32	9	27
<u>Region</u>						
Los Angeles County	14	17	19	9	8	33
San Diego County	17	15	17	5	15	31
Orange County	17	26	5	2	14	36
Inland Empire	28	14	16	3	13	26
Central Coast	21	16	15	9	9	30
Central Valley	24	14	8	6	9	39
San Francisco Bay Area	14	18	15	19	7	27
North Coast/Sierras	12	18	10	7	20	33
<u>Area</u>						
Urban area	14	21	13	14	7	31
Suburban area	20	15	15	7	11	32
Rural area	24	12	14	4	15	31

* less than 1/2 of 1% (D) denotes Democrat, (R) denotes Republican

The Senate candidates remain largely unknown to most likely voters

A major factor contributing to the large segment of undecided voters and those saying they would support “someone else” is that many voters have no opinion of the current field of candidates. For

example, 32% have no opinion of Schiff, 45% also have no opinion of Porter, 55% cannot offer an opinion of Lee, and a huge 71% have no opinion of Early.

Of those voters able to offer an opinion, views of the candidates are highly partisan, with Democratic voters holding the three Democratic contenders in high regard, while GOP voters offer highly negative assessments of the Democrats and view Early in a positive light.

Table 4
Image ratings of the major party candidates for U.S. Senate
(among likely voters in the March primary election)

	Total likely voters %	Democrats %	Republicans %	No Party Pref./others %
Katie Porter (D)				
Favorable	35	53	7	29
Unfavorable	20	7	41	20
No opinion	45	40	52	51
Adam Schiff (D)				
Favorable	36	56	5	31
Unfavorable	32	8	72	36
No opinion	32	36	23	33
Barbara Lee (D)				
Favorable	26	42	5	20
Unfavorable	19	6	39	22
No opinion	55	52	56	58
Eric Early (R)				
Favorable	18	6	37	21
Unfavorable	11	17	6	6
No opinion	71	77	57	73

Electing a Senator who'll bring a fresh perspective to the job more important than electing someone with long government experience

When considering next year's Senate election, by a three-to-one margin (63% to 21%) Californians say they feel it's more important to elect someone who'll bring a fresh perspective to the job than someone with long experience in government.

Large majorities across virtually all major segments of the voting electorate hold to this view, with one major exception. Among voters currently backing Schiff, 60% attach greater importance to electing a candidate, like Schiff, who has long government experience rather than one bringing a fresh perspective to the job (28%).

The economy/inflation the most important issue to voters in the Senate race

When voters are asked which of eleven major issues facing the country is most important to them in deciding whom to support in the Senate race, the issue cited most is the economy/inflation (23%), followed by threats to democracy (19%). Voters of all political stripes mention the economy/inflation as either their top concern or among their top concerns.

Large proportions of Democrats also cite threats to democracy and gun control as issues of importance to them. Among Republican voters concerns about the economy dominate, although many also cite immigration and crime/law enforcement as their top voting issue.

Table 5
Which of the following issues are most important in deciding whom to support for Senate
(among likely voters in the March primary election)

	Total likely voters	Democrats	Republicans	No Party Pref/others
	%	%	%	%
The economy/ inflation	23	16	32	28
Threats to democracy	19	25	14	15
Gun control	13	21	2	10
Immigration	10	2	21	12
Crime and law enforcement	9	3	20	9
Climate change	9	14	1	7
Abortion	6	8	3	5
Racial justice	2	4	*	1
Foreign policy	1	1	1	1
Critical race theory in the schools	1	2	1	2
The indictment of former President Trump	1	1	*	3
Other/no opinion	6	3	5	7

* less than 1/2 of 1%

When asked to rate each of the candidates on the issue they consider most important, voters generally view Porter and Schiff as being strong among voters giving priority to the issues of threats to democracy, abortion, climate change, and gun control. Lee also is viewed as being strong on these same issues but also scores highly among voters who give priority to the issue of racial justice. Assessments of Early are quite different as he is rated strongly among voters who attach priority to the issues of immigration and crime/law enforcement.

About the Survey

The findings in this report are based on a *Berkeley IGS Poll* completed by the Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) at the University of California, Berkeley. The poll was administered online in English and Spanish May 17-22, 2023, among 7,465 California registered voters, of whom a weighted subsample of 5,236 were considered likely to vote in the March 2024 primary election. Funding for the poll was provided in part by the *Los Angeles Times*.

The poll was conducted by distributing email invitations to stratified random samples of the state’s registered voters. Each email invited voters to participate in a non-partisan survey conducted by the University and provided a link to the IGS website where the survey was housed. Reminder emails were distributed to non-responding voters and an opt out link was provided for voters not wishing to receive further email invitations.

Samples of California registered voters with email addresses were derived from information contained on the official voter registration rolls and provided to IGS by Political Data, Inc.

To protect the anonymity of respondents, voters’ email addresses and all other personally identifiable information derived from the original voter listing were purged from the data file and replaced with a unique and anonymous identification number during data processing. In addition, after the completion of data collection, post-stratification weights were applied to the survey data file to align the sample of

registered voters to population characteristics of the registered voters statewide and within major regions of the state.

The sampling error associated with the survey results is difficult to calculate precisely because of sample stratification and post-stratification weighting. Nevertheless, it is likely that findings based on the overall sample of registered voters are subject to an estimated sampling error of approximately +/- 2 percentage points at the 95% confidence level, while overall findings from the subsample of likely voters would be subject to an estimated sampling error of approximately +/- 2.5 percentage points.

Question wording

Last February U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein announced that she would be retiring from office in 2024 after 32 years in office. Since then, she has fallen ill and has only recently returned to the Senate after a two-month absence. Below are some statements that have been made about this situation. For each please indicate whether you agree or disagree. (*See release for statements*)

In your opinion what would be the best resolution of Feinstein’s current situation? (1) Feinstein should resign from office and allow Governor Newsom to appoint her successor, (2) Feinstein should continue to serve, get well, and end her long Senate career on her own terms.

A number of candidates have already declared their candidacies to run for the U.S. Senate in next year’s 2024 elections. Suppose the election for U.S. Senate were being held today, for whom would you vote? (*See release for candidates listed*)

Please indicate whether your overall opinion of each of these Senate candidates is favorable or unfavorable, or whether don’t you know enough about him or her to offer an opinion?

When considering whom to support for U.S. Senate next year, which do you consider more important? (1) Electing someone with long experience in government, (2) Electing someone who’ll bring a fresh perspective to the job?

Which one of the following issues do you now consider most important to you in deciding whom to support for U.S. Senate? (*See release for issues listed*)

When thinking about the issue most important to you in deciding whom to support for U.S. Senate, how would you rate each of the Senate candidates on this issue – very strong, somewhat strong, somewhat weak, or very weak?

About the Institute of Governmental Studies

The Institute of Governmental Studies (IGS) is an interdisciplinary organized research unit that pursues a vigorous program of research, education, publication, and public service. A component of the University of California system’s flagship Berkeley campus, IGS is the oldest organized research unit in the UC system and the oldest public policy research center in the state. IGS’s co-directors are Professor Eric Schickler and Associate Professor Cristina Mora.

IGS conducts periodic surveys of public opinion in California on matters of politics and public policy through its *Berkeley IGS Poll*. The poll, which is disseminated widely, seeks to provide a broad measure of contemporary public opinion, and to generate data for subsequent scholarly analysis. The director of the *Berkeley IGS Poll* is Mark DiCamillo. For a copy of the detailed tabulations to this report or a listing of all past poll reports issued by the *Berkeley IGS Poll*, please visit the poll’s website at <https://www.igs.berkeley.edu/research/berkeley-igs-poll>.