

Barbara Boxer, Dianne Feinstein shouldn't run again, majority of voters say

By Seema Mehta

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Although U.S. Sens. Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein — two of California's most experienced political figures — remain popular, a majority of state voters say they should not run for reelection, according to a new USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll.

As analysts speculate about whether the Democratic stalwarts will seek additional six-year terms in coming years, 59% of registered voters said the state would be better off with new candidates for the two seats.

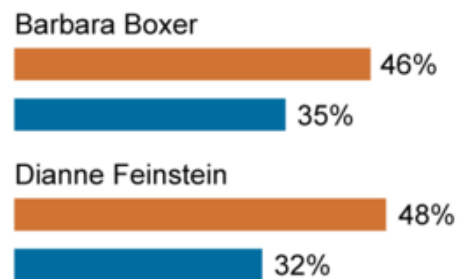
That sentiment was expressed by 79% of Republicans. But even many Democrats said it was time for new representation.

Forty-four percent of Democratic respondents preferred new candidates, compared with 43% who said Boxer and Feinstein should run again.

Two stalwarts

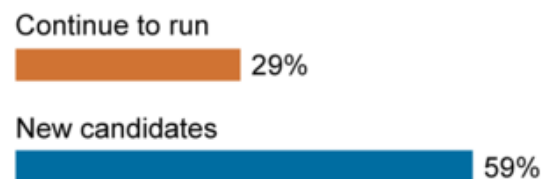
Q: What is your impression of these people? How favorable do you feel toward them?

■ Favorable ■ Unfavorable



Source: USC Dornsife/Los Angeles Times poll

Q: Would California be better off if our U.S. senators continued to run for reelection or if new candidates became our U.S. senators?



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USC Dornsife / Los Angeles Times Poll (Los Angeles Times)

"I think they're old," said Rich Mettling, a 67-year-old retired regulatory analyst with Southern California Edison and a registered Democrat. "I'd like to see some fresh senatorial blood."

"They don't even sound like they're engaged sometimes," he said.

But Mettling, who lives in Burbank, added that he would never vote for a Republican to replace either Feinstein, 81, or Boxer, 73.

The GOP's capture of the U.S. Senate on Tuesday has intensified questions about whether California's senators, who were not on Tuesday's ballot, will seek another term. Boxer is up for reelection in 2016, Feinstein in 2018. Neither has said whether she will run again.

"I have no idea what I'm going to be doing in 2018," Feinstein said on CNN's "State of the Union" late last month. "That's four years from now. And that's one of the nice things of a six-year term. I've served two years of my term and, you know, I'll make a decision in due time."

8

A longtime confidant of Boxer said Thursday that she would announce her plans next year.

Pollsters cautioned that the findings were not a reflection of any vulnerability for either official, but rather a manifestation of voters' frustration over gridlock in the nation's capital.

"Both Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer can get reelected senator in California for as long as they want," said poll director Dan Schnur, head of USC's Jesse M. Unruh Institute of Politics. "No Republican is going to beat them, and no plausible Democrat is going to be foolish enough to run against them.

"What these numbers reflect," he said, "is general restlessness in an electorate and dissatisfaction with the way politics is practiced in Washington, D.C."

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Drew Lieberman of Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, the Democratic half of the bipartisan team that conducted the poll, pointed to the senators' positive marks. Nearly half of voters viewed Boxer and Feinstein favorably, as did 66% of Democrats.

"I wouldn't take this as anything close to an indicator of electoral weakness for Sens. Boxer or Feinstein," he said, adding that the findings would be markedly different if voters were asked to select between either official and a GOP competitor.

"It's fine to say in a vacuum; it's something else entirely when you put a Republican face on the ballot next to them," he said.

The pair were first elected to the Senate in 1992, the so-called Year of the Woman. A then-record number of women were elected to the chamber in the aftermath of the contentious U.S. Supreme Court confirmation hearing on Clarence Thomas, which featured sexual-harassment testimony from Anita Hill. The legality of abortion was also a front-and-center issue.

Lifelong Californian Carol Little, 68, remembers that time vividly.

394

"It's always been a man's world, and everyone knows it. I just believe these women were so in tune to the future ... and have just done a marvelous job," said the registered Democrat, who lives in the wine country village of Cotati.

Little cited Boxer's and Feinstein's work on equal rights and equal pay for women as among the reasons she wants to see both run again.

"Over all these years, both ladies have held their heads up high representing the United States with nothing but 100% class," she said, "and that's why they need to be reelected."

The senators received strongest support from senior citizens, voters with the most education and residents of the Bay

Area, where Boxer and Feinstein launched their political careers.

But across the board — all ages, races, genders and incomes — respondents want new senators, according to the poll. Two of the fastest-growing voter groups — those who do not align with a political party and Latinos — overwhelmingly called for new leadership, as did younger voters.

Dave Kanevsky of American Viewpoint, the Republican polling firm that helped conduct the survey, noted that some of these groups are vital, and growing, parts of the Democratic coalition in California.

"Clearly there is some sentiment from parts of the Democratic coalition that it's time for change, that they want a new generation of leadership. Particularly if you're an incumbent, it should worry you," he said. "The encouraging news if you're a young Democrat in California is you've got a lot of good options."

Potential Democratic successors — Lt. Gov. Gavin Newsom, Atty. Gen. Kamala Harris, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and former Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa — are known by more than half of the state's registered voters, the poll found. And more people viewed them favorably than unfavorably.

Each had strengths in their geographic home bases and in different demographics — for example, Villaraigosa received positive marks from 52% of Latinos, while Newsom was viewed favorably by 59% of Bay Area voters — potentially setting the stage for an epic Democratic battle in coming years.

"The news here is sort of good for Democrats looking to the future," Kanevsky said. "The bench looks like it's got a good start at creating the next generation of Democratic leaders in the state."

The poll, conducted for the USC Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences and the Los Angeles Times, questioned 1,537 registered voters by telephone from Oct. 22 through 29. The margin of error for registered voters was 2.9 points in either direction, and higher for subgroups.

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