

# [***Feinstein was part of a movement that led to record numbers of women in politics***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69P2-2WS1-DY7V-G0G7-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Sen. Dianne Feinstein [*died Thursday*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/live-news/senator-dianne-feinstein-death/index.html), but her trailblazing legacy for women in ***politics*** has never been clearer.

When the [*California Democrat*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/29/politics/dianne-feinstein-death/index.html) first began her political career, she was an outlier. Women were simply hard to find in elected office. Today, they're more common than ever and acceptance of them is higher than it has ever been.

Feinstein was first elected to the Senate in 1992, the "[*Year of the Woman*](https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/minute/year_of_the_woman.htm)" that saw a [*record number of female senators*](https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/women_senators.htm) elected. Maryland Democrat Barbara Mikulski won a second term, and Feinstein and fellow Democrats Barbara Boxer of California, Patty Murray of Washington and Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois were newly elected. Including the previously elected Kansas Republican Nancy Kassebaum, there were six female senators in early 1993.

Feinstein and Boxer were the first two women elected to the US Senate from California. They were the first elected pair of female senators from any state.

Take a step back, though, to when Feinstein was first elected to any political office: 1969, when she won a seat on the San Francisco Board of Supervisors.

There was a grand total of one woman in the Senate at the time (Maine Republican [*Margaret Chase Smith*](https://www.cnn.com/2017/03/30/politics/tbt-margaret-chase-smith/index.html)). After Smith lost in 1972, there were no female senators for another five years.

At the beginning of this year, there were [*a record 25 women*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/11/23/politics/election-2022-record-women-in-congress/index.html) serving in the Senate. There are also four states where both senators are women - something that might have been unthinkable back in 1969.

The election of women in record numbers is a bipartisan affair. While more female senators at the beginning of the year were Democrats or caucused with them (16), nine were Republicans. That's also a record. There was just one Republican female senator when Feinstein started in the Senate.

The shift in women in elected office during Feinstein's time in ***politics*** came as Americans also shifted on their willingness to vote for them.

Consider [*a question that Gallup has been asking*](https://news.gallup.com/poll/285563/socialism-atheism-political-liabilities.aspx) for over 80 years: Would a respondent vote a generally well-qualified person who was a member of their party for president, if they happened to be a woman? In 1969, just 53% of Americans said they would, while 40% said that they would not.

When Feinstein was 4 years old in 1937, the numbers were even worse: 64% of Americans said they would not vote for a qualified woman to be president.

By 2020, 93% of Americans were saying they'd vote for a woman to be president if they were qualified.

Now, obviously, a woman hasn't been elected president yet. We have, however, seen women from both parties run for president with regularity. You'd have to go back to the 2008 GOP presidential primary when there wasn't a high-profile woman running for a party's nomination in an open race.

In 2016, Democrat [*Hillary Clinton*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/12/politics/hillary-clinton-white-house-visit/index.html) became the first woman [*to win a major-party nomination*](https://www.cnn.com/2016/06/06/politics/hillary-clinton-nomination-2016/index.html) for the presidency. More Americans voted for her than eventual winner Republican Donald Trump, who emerged victorious in the Electoral College.

In the last presidential cycle, Democrat [*Kamala Harris*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/22/politics/kamala-harris-democrats/index.html) became the [*first woman to win the vice presidency*](https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/07/politics/kamala-harris-speech/index.html). This cycle, former South Carolina Gov. [*Nikki Haley*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/02/politics/nikki-haley-gender-president-campaign/index.html) is in second or third place in many of the [*early-state*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/20/politics/cnn-poll-new-hampshire/index.html) and [*national polls*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/05/politics/cnn-poll-trump-primary-criminal-charges/index.html) of the Republican primary.

The fact is, it's probably no longer a matter of if a woman will be elected president, but when. This is certainly what the American people believe. When Feinstein was first elected to the Senate in 1992, a plurality (49%) said a woman would be elected president during their lifetime, according to Gallup.

By 2021, 71% of Americans said a woman would be elected president in their lifetime, an SSRS survey found.

Feinstein was part of a movement that allows hope like that to blossom.

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